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**Weaving the fragments of hope: Social movement learning
and popular education in Southwest Colombia**

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature:.....

.....25.4.21

Summary

How do social movements learn and produce knowledge in contexts of repression and violence? And in such contexts, how can radical pedagogy form part of social movement responses in seeking to construct radical alternatives? In this thesis, I attempt to answer these questions, in order to understand the role which a radical intercultural pedagogical initiative plays in the struggles of social movements to construct and defend alternative modes of being and organising in the repressive context of southwest Colombia. The initiative is led by a small, radical human rights NGO called Nomadesc, based in Cali, Colombia. Over the course of two decades, it has brought together activists from diverse social movements and territories across southwest Colombia in order to empower them to deal with the violent context; reimagine alternatives; and strengthen and interweave their struggles.

The Colombian context for social movements and their organising is uniquely intense. A country with diverse, vibrant social movements and significant levels of social protest, it is also consistently the most dangerous country in the world for activists, who are regularly targeted for assassination. Political violence has been a continuous feature of political and social life throughout the country's history. As in other Latin American countries, Colombian social movements have a long and rich history of employing popular education as a means of generating knowledge and learning amongst activists.

The underlying premise of this thesis is that the knowledge produced within social movements through their daily efforts to bring about social change is inherently valuable and of interest to activists and critical scholars. This is particularly so in the struggles of social movements on the peripheries of global capitalism in the Global South, where the knowledge of subaltern subjects has been discredited and ignored for centuries within the epistemological hierarchy of capitalist modernity (Santos, 2007). I employ a decolonial theoretical approach guided by the Epistemologies of the South framework of Boaventura de Sousa Santos, and which combines a critical realist ontology with the political economy work of Massimo De Angelis in order to lay out an ontological understanding of social movement struggles for social change. This thesis may be of interest to scholars spanning various disciplines, including critical education, social movement studies, Latin American studies, and postcolonial literature.

The thesis combines two complimentary methodological approaches: the systematisation of experiences (a collaborative, participatory research technique associated with popular educators in Latin America); and an 'engaged ethnography' developed specifically for activist social movement research (Mathers & Novelli, 2007). These two approaches were combined in an extensive period of fieldwork embedded

within the Nomadesc team in Colombia, allowing for a comprehensive data collection process with over 100 participants.

This thesis is concerned with the 'how', the 'what', and the 'so what' of the learning and knowledge production processes which emerge from this radical pedagogical initiative: that is, it seeks to analyse the nature and content of these processes, and to explore the effects which they have upon the participating social movements and their struggles. I argue that, as an initiative which emerged from and is embedded within the social movement struggles of southwest Colombia, the Nomadesc pedagogical process is itself a continuous learning process, shaped by a dialectic of learning which exists between the pedagogical initiative and the struggles of the social movements involved. This dialectic allows for a dynamic, horizontal process of collective knowledge construction. Highlighting the central role of the intercultural knowledge dialogue between subjects of struggle, I demonstrate the potential of radical pedagogy to produce counter-hegemonic learning and knowledge processes between diverse subjects of struggle. Within this intercultural knowledge dialogue, the diversity of the movements is conceived as a container of emancipatory potential.

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¡La lucha continua!

Glossary

ACIN	Association of Indigenous Councils of the North, Asociación de Cabildos Indígenas del Norte
ASOINCA	Association of Teachers and Education Workers of Cauca, Asociación de Institutores y Trabajadores de la Educación del Cauca
AUC	United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia, Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia
CIMA	Committee for the Integration of the Colombian Macizo, Comité de Integración del Macizo Colombiano
CNA	National Agrarian Coordination, Coordinador Nacional Agrario
COPDICONC	Afro-Colombian Community Council of the Western Cordillera of Nariño and Cauca, Consejo Comunitario de las Comunidades Negras de la Cordillera Occidental de Nariño y Cauca
CRIC	Cauca Regional Indigenous Council, Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca
CUT	Central Union of Workers, Central Unitario de Trabajadores
DANE	National Administrative Department of Statistics, Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística
ELN	National Liberation Army, Ejército de Liberación Nacional
EMCALI	Municipal Enterprises of Cali, Empresas Municipales de Cali
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
FARC	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
INGO	International Non-governmental Organisation
INS	National Trade Union Institute, Instituto Nacional Sindical
MOVICE	National Movement for Victims of State Crimes- Valle del Cauca branch, Movimiento Nacional de Víctimas de Crímenes del Estado capítulo Valle
MST	Landless Workers Movement, Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
Nomadesc	Association for Research and Social Action Nomadesc, Asociación para la Investigación y Acción Social Nomadesc
NSM	New Social Movement theory
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PCN	Black Communities Process, Proceso de Comunidades Negras
PCN-BN	Black Communities Process Buenaventura branch, Proceso de Comunidades Negras Palenque el Congal
PPT	Political Process Theory
PUSM	Popular University of Social Movements
ONIC	National Indigenous Organisation de Colombia, Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia
SENA	National Vocational Training Service, Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje
Sintraemcali	Trade Union of the Municipal Enterprises of Cali, Sindicato de trabajadores de las empresas municipales de Cali
Sintraunicol	Colombian National University Workers Union Valle del Cauca branch, Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores y Empleados Universitarios de Colombia Capítulo Valle del Cauca
UIP	Intercultural University of the Peoples, Universidad Intercultural de los Pueblos

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Introduction

How do social movements learn and produce knowledge in contexts of repression and violence? And in such contexts, how can radical pedagogy form part of social movement responses in seeking to construct radical alternatives? In this thesis I examine the learning and knowledge processes which have emerged from an intercultural social movement popular education intervention. Over the course of two decades, this initiative has brought together activists from diverse social movements and territories across southwest Colombia in order to empower them to deal with the violent context; reimagine alternatives; and strengthen and interweave their struggles. This brief introductory chapter provides some important background to the research and to my own connection to the case study, telling the story of how I came to embark upon this research journey. It goes on to discuss the underlying research ethos, before finally setting out the structure and logic of the thesis.

Background

I first arrived to Colombia in 2007 as an idealistic, curious and perhaps somewhat naïve 22-year-old, with only the most basic grasp of the *castellano* language. A chance encounter within a few weeks brought me into contact with the world of human rights activism and a network of radical activists and organisations who would open my eyes to the cruel realities of the political violence in the country I had arrived to. I was immediately enthralled by this vibrant, frenetic, confusing and at times frightening political world, and the larger than life, uber-committed activists who dedicated their lives to the struggle for social change whilst facing the constant risk of physical attack and even assassination. It was in many ways a political awakening for me. I threw myself into volunteering to try and help out in any way I could, and found myself on a steep political learning curve. As somebody who had always considered themselves to be politically engaged and informed, it was a process of political socialisation which was completely alien to anything I had experienced in activist circles in the UK. It shook me to the core, and altered my entire world view. The organisation that introduced me to this world of the struggle and sacrifice of the social movements of southwest Colombia was a small, radical human rights organisation called Nomadesc.

I began to go often to the Nomadesc office, and to accompany the organisation's activists in their activities in urban and rural territories all across the region. It was truly a sensory and emotional overload, and I

became inspired by the struggles of rural peasant, indigenous and black¹ communities to defend their territories against corporate interests and armed actors; trade unions fighting against privatisation of public services; victims groups campaigning for justice for the murders of their loved ones, including survivors and relatives of victims of the most horrific human rights atrocities who had channelled their grief into activism; or shack dwellers struggling against eviction and for dignified housing conditions. A constant stream of activists from any number of movements would file through the office, seeking human rights advice, planning a protest or workshop, or simply borrowing the space to hold their own meetings. I learned about each of the movements and their struggles, as well as the violence, harassment and repression which they invariably faced in their everyday lives as activists. Despite this harsh reality, the meetings, protests, workshops and events would invariably involve music, dance, symbology and colour, as well as laughter and joviality.

I became part of the inner circle within the Nomadesc team, and part of the broader network of activists in the southwest region. I had never felt so engaged and committed to a cause. A short stint became an extended period of time living in Colombia. My contributions included providing human rights accompaniment, translation of documents, interpretation for visiting delegations, and providing an extra pair of hands in anything I could within the organisation. I was always made to feel part of these struggles, and was accepted as ‘compañero Patrick’, an adopted Colombian. I witnessed and participated in historic social movement struggles, such as a two-month long sugar cane cutters strike in Valle del Cauca and Cauca, or the *Minga of Social and Communitarian Resistance* in the same year. During the latter, the indigenous movement of Cauca led a broad alliance of movements in order to face down the feared government of Alvaro Uribe, bringing out thousands to march with them across the country to the capital Bogota and forcing President Uribe to travel to their indigenous territory to hear their demands

I was struck by Nomadesc’s radical and deeply political approach to human rights, which provided a stark contrast to that of international human rights NGOs which claim ‘political neutrality’ in their advocacy. This was an NGO which was very different to the understanding of NGO to which I had been accustomed. Having emerged from the labour movement, Nomadesc sees itself as very much part of the social

¹ Several black self-identification terms are used by activists and intellectuals in Colombia, including ‘black community(ies)’, ‘Afro-Colombians’ and afrodescendientes, or ‘Afro-descendants’. I use each of these terms at different points during the thesis. According to Oslender, after the 1991 Constitution was passed, the term ‘black community’ ‘became specifically associated with the new Constitution and follow-up legislation’. (2016:p13)

movement, and as part of the struggles of the social movements which it works with. That meant working with communities to develop radical solutions, in the most literal sense of the word radical: that is, seeking to go to the root of the problem. Hence, it was an approach which sought to strengthen the struggles of communities, and which had been forged through praxis as opposed to taken from a textbook.

One aspect of this holistic approach to working with communities, which was always prominent within Nomadesc, was the focus they placed on education and action research, which at the time took the form of a human rights diploma course. I would attend the diploma sessions, and found them particularly fascinating as a physical manifestation of the diverse network of organisations and movements of the region which Nomadesc worked with, bringing together activists across political cultural and territorial boundaries. The coming together of trade unionists, students, indigenous, peasant and black community activists, amongst many others, made for a lively, joyful and politically plural learning environment. It was a real-world example of an emancipatory pedagogy of hope and solidarity. It was here that for the first time I would hear the name of Paolo Freire, and terms such as ‘popular education’ and ‘knowledge dialogue’. I was captivated by a pedagogical praxis which was steeped in a class-based analysis of the structural factors which conditioned social reality in Colombia, and at the same time emphasised the cultural diversity of the movements as a source of emancipatory potential.

Throughout its history, this pedagogical-organisational strategy has taken place alongside some of Colombia’s most significant social struggles of recent decades. The trade unions and social movements involved in this pedagogical process have led struggles of national and international significance. These include the 36-day occupation of the headquarters of the regional public utilities provider in Cali by Sintraemcali trade union in 2001 in opposition to planned privatisation; the aforementioned Minga; or the 22-day civic strike in the predominantly black city of Buenaventura in 2017 to demand dignity, rights, respect and social investment in Colombia’s principal port city on the Pacific Coast. It is in this context, characterised by vibrant, militant social movement organising and high levels of repression and violence from state and paramilitary groups, that Nomadesc’s pedagogical strategy has sought to strengthen social movements by connecting struggles and networks, providing tools and information for the defence of human rights, and developing an intercultural knowledge dialogue between the diverse social movements which converge within the pedagogical process.²

² See Appendix 1 for profiles of a selection of the social movements and organisations involved in the process.

When I moved back to the UK in 2010, I became involved in international solidarity activism with the Colombia Solidarity Campaign, as well as with trade unions in the North East of England which had developed ongoing solidarity ties with Nomadesc along with other social movements and trade unions in southwest Colombia. My Colombia activism continued also through my paid work: initially as a trade union organiser for UNISON Northern, and subsequently as a programmes officer for the anti-poverty NGO War on Want, where Nomadesc was one of the Global South partners which the programme I worked on aimed to support. Back in the UK, I became interested in the praxis of solidarity activism with Colombia, and increasingly underwhelmed by the repetitive routine nature of international interactions between activists, which tended not to get beyond discussion of the context of violence, human rights violations and neoliberalism. I would often argue the case for engagement on a deeper, more political and creative level, and for activist education to be given more consideration. And I would try the patience of comrades with my talk of how much we could learn from activists in Colombia and across Latin America. In my role at War on Want I was involved in developing a project with Nomadesc which sought to create a mutual learning process between British and Colombian activists.

Meanwhile, Nomadesc and the social movements involved in its pedagogical process had decided to transform the pedagogical initiative and create a popular university, run by and for social movements: the Universidad Intercultural de los Pueblos (Intercultural University of the Peoples – henceforth UIP). I was involved in discussions with comrades in Colombia and the UK about how we could support this new initiative, and it was in the course of these discussions that we came to reflect upon the fact that those who had been involved in this pedagogical process over the years had never taken the opportunity to step back and collectively reflect upon the remarkable journey, on how they had got to where they were, and what they had learned along the way. Out of these conversations, and this desire to support the process of building the UIP, emerged the idea for the research process on which this thesis is based. Working with Professor Mario Novelli and Nomadesc, as well as social movements in Turkey, Nepal and South Africa, we would subsequently develop a much larger ESRC-funded collaborative research project into social movement learning and knowledge processes which sought to facilitate knowledge dialogue and exchange between the four movements. My work on this project, which had many intersections with the focus of this thesis, facilitated a more extensive, elaborate data collection process that included bringing together a wide range of the movements and individuals who together created the history of the pedagogical process under investigation in this thesis, allowing them to finally engage in a long overdue collective reflection upon the pedagogical journey.

I spent from March 2017- December 2018 engaged in extensive fieldwork in Colombia, based in the Nomadesc office in the city of Cali. During this time, I combined my research with my activism and became heavily involved in different aspects of Nomadesc's human rights defence work. It would prove to be a particularly intense period (even by Nomadesc's standards): one of exhilarating highs such as the aforementioned Buenaventura civic strike; and soul-destroying lows, including the murders of two activists belonging to the social movements which Nomadesc works with. It was an emotionally draining roller-coaster, but a period which served to reinforce my commitment to the social movements of southwest Colombia and their fights for justice and dignity. It is my hope that this research process makes a small contribution to the benefit of these struggles and others, by facilitating learning about and from Nomadesc's unique work.

A research ethos rooted in solidarity, accountability and internationalism

As a process which stemmed from my own involvement in solidarity activism, the ethos of the research presented in this thesis is based upon the principles of solidarity, accountability and internationalism. I am part of the struggle about which I write, and have played an active if marginal role within it. I make no pretence of objectivity. Rather than seeking to reproduce what I consider the false binary between social scientist and social reality, I embrace my position within that social world. Drawing upon the systematisation of experiences methodology, a participatory research technique associated with popular educators in Latin America, we embarked upon a collaborative, collective data collection process in which the Nomadesc activists were involved in the design and implementation of the process. That is to say, this is an exercise in activist research, in which the research process was as important as the final products. It also means that the process aimed to be of benefit to Nomadesc and the social movements involved in the pedagogical process.

The underlying premise of this thesis is that the knowledge produced within social movements through their daily efforts to bring about social change, '*al calor de la lucha*' as they say in Colombia – in the heat of the struggle- is inherently valuable and of interest to activists and critical scholars. This is particularly so in the struggles of social movements on the peripheries of global capitalism in the Global South, where the knowledge of subaltern subjects has been discredited and ignored for centuries within the epistemological hierarchy of capitalist modernity (Santos, 2007). This research follows the call of Boaventura de Sousa Santos for social science research to engage with the Epistemologies of the South,

and for researchers to take on the role of the translator in order to enable mutual intelligibility between social movements which are at the frontlines of the fight against neoliberal capitalism.

The question of whether humanity is able to rise to the existential challenges which it faces in the 21st century will depend to a large degree on the struggles of social movements around the world, and above all upon the capacity of social movements to overcome political, cultural, racial, and physical borders and barriers in order to join struggles and collaborate at local, national and international level. With this thesis I provide a rigorous, participatory case study of one example of a social movement pedagogical praxis which is doing exactly that, in the most challenging of circumstances. It is a story which has inspired me, and which I believe deserves to be heard and understood in all of its complexity. I hope that the result will be of interest to academics and activists alike.

Research Questions and Thesis Structure

Based on the aforementioned ethos, this thesis seeks to understand the ‘how’, the ‘what’, and the ‘so what’ of these learning and knowledge production processes: that is, to understand the nature and content of these processes, and to explore the effects which they have upon the social movements and their struggles. I set out to address three principal research questions about the Nomadesc pedagogical process, aimed at understanding the related learning and knowledge production processes:

RQ1) How has Nomadesc’s pedagogical work (specifically the period between 1999 and 2017) sought to strengthen social movement struggles in southwest Colombia?

- i) How have knowledge and learning processes been harnessed within the pedagogical praxis?

RQ2) What have Nomadesc and the organisations it works with learned through this work?

- i) What principles, strategies and concepts underpin this radical pedagogical praxis, and how have they evolved?

RQ3) What have been the effects of Nomadesc’s pedagogical work upon the participating social movements and their struggles?

The thesis is divided into three sections. Section 1 comprises of three chapters which lay the groundwork for the thesis. Chapter 1 presents a review of the relevant literature in order to locate my thesis within

broad academic debates, focussing upon three particular strands relating to the academic discussion of social movements: first, the different strands of social movement studies literature; second, literature relating to the question of social movement knowledge; and third, the question of the radical pedagogy and praxis of social movements. Chapter 2 sets out the socio-economic and political context of the southwest of Colombia in order to lay the basis for an embedded understanding of the Nomadesc case study. Chapter 3 presents the research methodology and theoretical framework.

Section 2 presents the case study across three chapters. Chapter 4 presents an in-depth discussion of the history of the NOMADESC pedagogical process, foregrounding the voices of the protagonists in order to track its evolution and the dialectical relationship which it has had with the changing conjunctures of the region. Chapter 5 draws upon a case study of one of southwest Colombia's most prominent social movements, the Proceso de Comunidades Negras Palenque el Congal Buenaventura (Black Communities Process Buenaventura branch- henceforth PCN-BN) in order to provide a grounded account of Nomadesc's pedagogical praxis, and to trace the undulating learning and knowledge production processes which it produces. Chapter 6 lifts the bonnet on the pedagogical process in order to peer into the epistemological inner workings of this radical social movement pedagogical praxis and explore the learning and knowledge processes which emerge from the intercultural knowledge dialogue which underpins it. In keeping with the research ethos set out above and more substantially in chapter 3, in these chapters I seek to try to minimise the use of external theory, as much as is possible, and instead seek to foreground the voices of the protagonists. The themes of analysis are thus emergent from the data itself: these chapters seek to allow the social movement protagonists of this research process to speak and for their own theories to be heard. In this way I try to avoid replicating the epistemological tendencies which I criticise in these same pages of forcing the empirical data to fit these pre-existing theories.

Section 3 comprises of the concluding chapter. Chapter 7 provides a brief summary of the key findings, before going on to relate some of these to the relevant theoretical debates within critical literature on social movements and emancipatory struggle

SECTION ONE

Chapter 1: Literature Review

In this literature review chapter, I seek to locate my research within a broad, varied and somewhat amorphous body of literature relating to social movements. I seek to provide an overview of the ways in which social movement learning and knowledge processes have been understood and conceptualised. The aim of this chapter is to sketch out relevant strands of literature in order to locate my own case study, and at the same time demonstrate the relevance of my thesis.

The chapter begins with a broad overview of distinct paradigms within social movement literature, in order to develop an understanding of how social movements have been understood from different perspectives. I also examine literary contributions which analyse the praxis of social movements which have emerged in Latin America in recent decades. Secondly, I discuss the ways in which social movement knowledge has been understood and theorised, and how it relates to broader decolonial debates within the social sciences. Thirdly, I explore diverse literature which illuminates the ways in which social movements harness learning processes through their praxis. In this section I draw upon the work of movement intellectuals and scholar activists from Latin America and Africa.

1.1 Social movement studies

Origins

The heterogenous academic literature on social movements has a long history and spans multiple academic disciplines and approaches. Whilst perhaps not articulating it as such, it can be argued that grandees of social theory such as Marx, Durkheim, and Weber engaged to different degrees in the study of social movements, given that each sought to explain the role of collective action and social protest in generating social change. Within academic literature social movements remain a hotly contested (and arguably oft misunderstood) topic.

The discipline today known as ‘social movement studies’ developed as a field within sociology during the second half of the 20th Century, particularly from the 1960s onwards. Prior to the 1960s, dominant approaches to sociology tended to understand protest and collective action for social change as a form of social pathology (Flacks, 2004). Across the world, the incidence of social movements and collective action surged in the 1960s, with 1968 being a particular zenith as diverse struggles exploded across the world,

including in Europe and the US huge anti-war movements, wildcat strikes, student occupations and civil rights movements; whilst peoples across Africa, Latin America and Asia rose up against imperialism, dictatorships, colonialism and repression. Students were often at the forefront of struggles, and the wave of collective action had an intense intellectual dimension, calling into question much mainstream theory within the social sciences, which seemed to many restricting and unable to account for the emerging struggles which were threatening to transform the world (Wainwright, 1994). In this sense, social movement theory was linked to the emergence of the 'new left', which rejected capitalism and at the same time also rejected orthodox Marxism, particularly its Soviet inspired variant.

Despite the frequency of its use, there is no single universally accepted definition of the concept of a social movement, with diverse understandings according to different theoretical paradigms. Surveying the social movement literature in 1992, Diani identified a '*substantial convergence*' amongst otherwise divergent perspectives on social movements: first, they operate as '*networks of informal interaction*'; second, they hold shared beliefs and solidarity which provide a sense of belongingness to the collective; and third, they are geared towards collective action, usually in conflict with other social forces (Diani, 1992:p7). For Flacks, social movements are '*social formations that involve large numbers of people who are seeking change in what they define as their shared interest (although they usually claim more universal benefit as well*' (Flacks, 2004:p162). Some authors have argued that social movements need not necessarily be progressive in their politics, and indeed some may struggle in order to maintain the status quo. Cox and Barker define social movements as:

a process in which a specific social group develops a collective project of skilled activities centred on a rationality – a particular way of making sense of and relating to the social world- that tries to change or maintain a dominant structure of entrenched needs and capacities, in part or whole' (Nilsen and Cox, 2013:65)

Whilst there is undoubtedly some crossover between different strands of social movement literature, it is possible to draw some broad (and somewhat crude) categorisations of the field. Mainstream Western strands of social movement theory have emerged from North America and Europe. The paradigm which emerged from North America draws influence from functionalist epistemological and ontological positions, and the various strands which it includes have been referred to as 'resource mobilisation theory'. Resource mobilisation theorists tend to view social movements as phenomena of collective action within a generally functioning society (for example Tilly, 1985; Tarrow, 1998; McAdam, 1982). They also tend to focus on the organisational analysis of social movements, highlighting variables such as resources and opportunities. A particularly prominent strand within resource mobilisation theory is Tilly's political

process theory (PPT), which seeks to analyse movements in terms of how they take advantage of political opportunities presented in their relationships with the state or other groups (Tilly, 1985). Tilly's model seeks to predict the conditions in which movements may emerge, the types of action which movements may take, and even their chances of success. Writing with McAdam and Tarrow in 2007, Tilly subsequently attempted to respond to critics of PPT approaches by developing the notion of 'contentious politics' to social movements, based on the idea that social movements make claims which infringe upon the interests of other actors (McAdam, Tilly and Tarrow, 2007).

Resource mobilisation theorists have been criticised for a tendency to extract the struggles of social movements from broader structural analysis of the socio-economic context (Choudry, 2015; Scandrett, 2012, Flacks, 2004, Barker et al, 2013). In the search for a universally applicable general theory of social movements, they also tend to arrive at levels of abstraction and generalisation which inevitably produce reductive, simplified theory. According to Flacks, this tendency has increased over the years with the growing neoliberalisation of academia (Flacks, 2004). Goodwin and Jasper argue that political process theorists have a tendency to 'overextend' key concepts, such as 'political opportunity', to the point that they become essentially meaningless, *'virtually anything that, in retrospect, can be seen as having helped a movement mobilise or attain its goals becomes labelled a political opportunity'* (Goodwin and Jasper, 1999:p36).

Flacks takes issue with the structuralism of PPT theorists, arguing that their analysis of political opportunity does not take sufficient heed of the fact that power relations are embedded within the dynamics of the political economy, which for Flacks ultimately means that such theorists lack a theory of power (Flacks, 2004). Another underlying problem is the fact that there often exists a fundamental contradiction between functionalist approaches, which essentially view social movements as just another organisational layer within a functioning society, and the world view of their objects of study, who often see themselves as agents seeking structural societal transformation.

New Social Movement Theory

The umbrella term 'New Social Movement' (NSM) theory has been applied to quite varied mainstream analytical models for the analysis of social movement which have emerged in Europe. Some NSM theorists have drawn upon Marxist ideas (such as Touraine, 1981), whereas others have made a clean break with Marxist modes of analysis (Melucci, 1989). However, they tend to have in common a concern for questions around why new social actors emerge, and to include a focus on the role of culture in seeking to

understand social movements and their struggles; which often means taking account of factors such as the construction of collective identities and lifestyles. Some strands of NSM are influenced by symbolic interactionism and seek to analyse motivation, experience and communication networks of individual activists involved in social movements (Polletta, 2004; Melucci, 1989). Poletta, from the symbolic interactionist approach, criticised approaches which

fail to examine the ways in which movements reshape beliefs, moral codes, identities, and other cultural elements. A movement may fail politically—or not even directly engage in the political—and yet have major effects on daily life because of its cultural impacts. Movements, in short, produce knowledge, art, symbols, and identities, as well as challenges to political authority. (2004:p116)

One influential theorist who has paid much attention to the role of culture in relation to understanding social movements is Italian sociologist Alberto Melucci. Writing in 1980, Melucci argued that the expansion of capitalism further into people's personal lives and social relations meant that class struggle was shifting terrain, and that the realm of identity was itself now a site of resistance by individuals and movements (ibid:p219). Melucci's analysis assigned a class character to the diverse new struggles which were emerging in spheres of social relations, in particular the private and personal spheres. This allowed him to recognise the diversity of the social subject, and the heterogeneous struggles and identities in play, by extending rather than removing the concept of the social relations of production.

Melucci's later work followed other constructivist and symbolic interactionist NSM theorists and he became increasingly hermeneutical in his understanding of social reality and the collective action of social movements. This meant understanding collective action and identity as a social construct and seeking to understand the way that actors produce collective meanings (Melucci, 1989; Jasper and Goodwin, 2004; Poletta, 2004). Such theory can be useful in helping us to grasp the internal dynamics and heterogeneous characteristics of social movements (in particular those shaped by 'identity politics'), but like their functionalist counterparts they have been criticised for the tendency to extract movements from the historical context which brought about their recent rise to prominence and which prompted Melucci's initial concern for the cultural terrain: neoliberal globalisation (Flacks, 2004).

Marxist approaches to social movements

NSM theories can be understood as a set of responses to the perceived inadequacy of orthodox structural Marxist approaches to account for social movements which began to emerge from 1968 onwards. These new social movements were significant subjects of struggle which could not be easily slotted into the

traditional class analyses (for example the peace movement and the women's movement). A recurring problem for orthodox Marxist analyses of social movements has been to explain apparently non-economic based, heterogenous mass struggles. In recent years more concerted efforts have been made to overcome this impasse and to develop a more cohesive Marxist theoretical body on social movements (McNally, 2006; Cox and Nilsen, 2014; Barker et al, 2013). Perhaps the most prominent attempt is Hardt and Negri's concept of the new working class multitude, which posits an internationally oppressed 'multitude' which includes middle class workers alongside working classes tied together in the common production of immaterial labour, and oppressed by the globalised neoliberal institutional framework, which they refer to as Empire (Hardt and Negri, 2001; Bowring, 2004).

For McNally, the root cause of the failure of some strands of historical materialist research to grasp the heterogenous characteristics of social movements and their struggles over recent decades is a theoretical conception of class which renders it unable to appreciate the differentiation which is inherent to the social body (McNally, 2013). McNally draws upon the Marxist historical sociologist EP Thompson's conceptualisation of class to argue for a more dynamic understanding of class as a dynamic social relationship:

class is not this or that part of the machine, but the way the machine works once it is set in motion – not this interest or that interest, but the friction of interests – the movement itself, the heat, the thundering noise. Class is a social and cultural formation (often finding institutional expression) which cannot be defined abstractly, or in isolation, but only in terms of relationship with other classes (Thompson, 1978:p85)

Hence, for Thompson and McNally, class begins with concrete experience. McNally emphasises that under this dynamic, relational understanding of class as a social and cultural formation, class identities must always be '*fluid and contested*'. Crucially, he argues that a common misunderstanding within intersectional analyses is the failure to appreciate the way in which the various '*axes of social life*', such as race, class, gender and sexuality- are internally related rather than '*constituted in advance of their intersection*' (2013:p411). This is important because McNally contends that attempts to provide a class analysis of social movements with heterogenous characteristics should not mean to reduce such movements to class, '*but rather to demonstrate the ways in which class-dynamics decisively shape their direction, modes of struggle, cultures of resistance and forms of organisation*' (ibid).

One strand of Marxism which has been particularly sensitive to the diversity of social movements and their struggles has been Open Marxism. With theoretical roots in both Marxist and anarchist traditions, Open

Marxists place their theoretical emphasis on class struggle, agency, and the ways that social movements are able to organise resistance in relation to the class system (De Angelis, 2007; 2014; Dinerstein, 2010 and 2014; Holloway, 2005, 2016). Scholars such as Ana Dinerstein, John Holloway and Massimo De Angelis ground their analysis in their own history of activism and closeness to social movements, taking a strong interest in social movement praxis and possibilities for social change. Such approaches have the potential to offer a theoretical avenue which can overcome the economistic determinism which is often associated with orthodox Marxist approaches, without dispensing with a recognition of the importance of the capitalist system in shaping the contexts in which struggles occur.

Movement-relevant theory

A criticism which has been made of the mainstream social movement theory strands, resource mobilisation theories and NSM theories, is that they lack relevance for the movements themselves and the people involved in the day to day activities of movements because they *'often have little of substance to say about the struggles of the day'* (Cox and Nilsen, 2014:p17; also Flacks, 2004; Bevington and Dixon, 2005). It was Richard Flacks (2004) who first introduced the notion of movement relevance into the social movement debates. Flacks questioned the moral and intellectual value of social movement research which is not relevant to social movements themselves (Flacks, 2004). Surveying the ever-growing field of social movement scholarship, he asked *'What is all this analysis for? In what way does the validation, elaboration, and refinement of concepts provide useable knowledge for those seeking social change?'* (ibid:p138).

Following on from Flacks' questioning of the relevance of mainstream social movement studies, a small but significant body of literature has emerged over the past decade which seeks to radically turn that trend on its head, and challenge the detachment of scholar from movement by prioritising the aim of making research relevant and accountable to social movements themselves (Bevington and Dixon, 2005; Choudry, 2015; Cox and Nilsen, 2014; McNally, 2013). In response to Flacks, Bevington and Dixon made a strong call for a new wave of 'movement-relevant theory' which is useful to those involved in struggles for social change (2005). Therefore the study of social movement organising and learning processes has been identified as one particularly relevant area for social movement analysis which seeks to be movement-relevant (Della Porta, 2017). This body of literature is explored below.

For some Western scholars, the strands of social movement theory outlined above might be understood to represent the 'canon' of the academic literature which seeks to provide explanatory analysis of

movements and their struggles. Despite recent progress, the field of mainstream social movement studies, like other social science disciplines, has tended to be quite Eurocentric and self-referential, and in seeking to create universal categories and concepts, has tended to overlook the different contexts and struggles of social movements in the Global South. This is particularly ironic given that some of the most prominent and important social movement struggles have occurred in the Global South in recent decades, particularly in Latin America, where movements have had notable successes. The following section thus turns to literature which has emerged from engagement with Latin American social movements.

Engaging with Latin American social movements

It is important here to avoid the essentialising tendency which exists within strands of Western literature (as well as often within Latin American literature!) to refer to Latin American approaches to understanding social movements as a homogenous whole. As in other regions of the world, there exist a broad range of theoretical approaches to social movements within Latin America, many of which have been shaped in some way through interactions with mainstream Western theoretical approaches.

For example, important Latin American contributions to social movement theory have come from a historical materialist perspective from authors such as Vergara (2014), and Petras and Veltmeyer (2011). They have sought to explain Latin American social movement struggles of recent decades in relation to the broader political economic processes related to imperialism in the 21st century and neoliberal transformations which have taken place, prioritising these structural dimensions and macro-processes over subjective dimensions. Petras and Veltmeyer (2011) sought to answer a key question in regard to Latin American social movements which is the prominence of peasant movement struggles across the continent. They do so with reference to neoliberal transformations in relations of production and property which have created a crisis of impoverishment, marginalisation and dispossession in peasant economies, but argue that capitalism in countries across Latin America has failed to absorb and integrate this dispossessed peasant labour into urban economies (ibid). Petras and Veltmeyer's account has been criticised for following mainstream approaches in failing to take recognise the importance of subjective dimensions of social movement struggles (Sankey, 2015).

Based on in-depth case studies of the Zapatistas in Mexico and the MST in Brazil, Vergara (2014) concludes that the new peasant movements of Latin America mark a rupture with previous peasant movements, and can be seen as a rejection of the broad-ranging impacts of neoliberalism and alienating aspects of urban

life under capitalism in Latin America. Hence he argues that they are at the same time a revindication of alternative indigenous and peasant ways of life (Vergara, 2014).

Some of the most original and illustrative attempts to understand 21st century social movements, and to explain their heterogeneous characteristics which do not lend themselves easily more orthodox conceptions of class, have come from Latin American scholars (Escobar, 2008, 2020; Zibechi, 2005, 2007, 2012; Dinerstein, 2014). Critical sociologists such as Escobar, Zibechi and Santos have pointed to dimensions such as the praxis, epistemological and ontological frameworks, and learning processes of Latin American social movements in order to call into question Western theoretical frameworks for social movements. They at the same time recognise the importance of broader macro-economic contexts of neoliberalism and its wide-ranging social, economic, cultural and political impacts (Escobar, 2008, 2020; Zibechi, 2005, 2007, 2012; Santos, 1999). The work of these three in particular has arguably played an important role in opening up new debates and avenues within the study of social movements which seek to engage with the knowledge processes of social movements and challenge the colonial groundings of mainstream approaches to the study of social movements. All three are discussed in more depth in subsequent sections of this chapter.

Latin America's new social movements

As local, national and global contexts shift, so too do social movements and their praxis change, with new social movements, struggles and praxis emerging. The end of the 1980s and into the 1990s marked a time of epoch-defining transformations at international level. With the fall of the Berlin Wall, the advance of neoliberalism across the world was consolidated as the only game in town, and famously heralded as the '*end of history*' (Fukuyama, 1989). The implications of the disappearance of a socialist superpower for social movements around the world were huge, and the period saw a '*crisis of paradigms*' for social movements in Latin America and beyond.

The accumulated discontents of populations across Latin America from the late 1990s into the 2000s gave rise to some of the most emblematic struggles in response to neoliberal reforms and their wide-ranging social impacts. These included trade unions, peasant, indigenous and black movements, community struggles against the expansion of mass-scale extractive activity, women's movements, amongst others. The struggles included strong class-based anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist and anti-neoliberal narratives, and at the same time were fertile grounds for new political imaginations and creative forms of organising, for example from cultural, feminist and environmental perspectives (Dinerstein, 2014; Zibechi, 2007; 2012;

Motta et al, 2014; Holloway, 2005; Escobar, 2008; Solano & Icaza, 2019; Rivera Cusicanqui, 2018; Motta & Bermudez, 2019; Solano et al, 2015).

Zibechi argues that many of these new movements, in their characteristics and praxis, show marked ruptures with past movements and are '*transversing new routes*' (2012:p13). Dinerstein (2014) contends that recent decades have seen the emergence of new forms of prefigurative, autonomous politics within Latin American social movements. It has been claimed that the new autonomist politics being practiced by social movements in Latin America- from indigenous movements to new forms of urban struggle- require new conceptual frameworks in order to understand them (Dinerstein, 2014; Motta, 2014; Zibechi, 2012). Holloway has described 'new politics' which emerged in Latin America, which is 'not centered on the idea that in order to make change, movements must acquire state power' (Holloway, 2005:n.p). This has involved a shift away from vanguardism towards more horizontal, prefigurative forms of organising which rather than following a pre-defined ideological path, seek collective construction of the route which the struggle should take and indeed the utopia which is aspired to. Such a politics, states Holloway, starts '*by admitting that we don't have the answers. Probably we have to think of advancing through experiments and questions: "preguntando caminamos" - "walking we ask questions" - as the Zapatistas put it*' (ibid).

Motta describes how in recent decades Latin America has seen the powerful emergence of 'epistemological and educational alternatives and decolonial practices' which have resisted the 'neoliberal projects' attempt to disarticulate alternative epistemological and ontological horizons of the political' (Motta, 2014:p4). She claims that the unique experiences and histories of Latin American social movements and broader populations have produced unique, innovative forms of organising (Motta, 2014).

However, despite identifying the novel nature of these new Latin American social movements, Zibechi also emphasises that these do not simply emerge from a political and ideological vacuum. As well as the broader external context, he identifies three major political and social currents which emerged from Latin America and 'form an ethical and cultural frame' for Latin American social movements: *the grassroots Christian communities linked to liberation theology; the Indian (indigenous) insurgency, with its non-Western cosmology; and Guevarism, the inspiration for revolutionary militancy* (2012:p13). Zibechi argues that '*these currents of thought and action converged, giving rise to a rich 'mestizaje' or mix that is one of the distinguishing characteristics of the Latin American movements*' (ibid). The three currents identified by Zibechi are all reflected within Nomadesc's own political origins and evolution.

In analysing the praxis of the social movements which have emerged in opposition to neoliberalism in Latin America over recent decades, Zibechi identifies common traits which are often to be found. Firstly, many of the social movements - both urban and rural- are engaged in processes of territorialisation: *'they have roots in spaces that have been recuperated or otherwise secured through long struggles'* (ibid:p14). Secondly, they increasingly seek autonomy from the state as well as political parties. This autonomy is based on the *'movements' growing capacity to provide for their own subsistence'* (ibid:p15). The third common characteristic which he identifies is what he refers to as the re-valorisation of culture and the affirmation of identity - that is to say, culture and identity (including gender and ethnic identity) are mobilised as movement resources and are reaffirmed through praxis. Fourth, the movements are increasingly *'educational subjects'* in their own right, engaged in the formation of their own intellectuals (ibid). Fifth, Zibechi posits that there has been a transformation in the gender relations of these movements which means that women are found participating at all levels of the movements, including in leadership roles (ibid:p15).

According to Zibechi, *'what is new in the last decade is the intensity with which some movements have assumed responsibility for education....they appear to be in a position to reconstruct forms of knowledge destroyed by neoliberalism'* (ibid:p22). Indeed, it has been argued that pedagogy is at the heart of the praxis of these movements (Motta, 2014; Zibechi, 2012), and plays an important role in the emergence of a *'reinvented emancipatory politics'* and the *'immanent development' of emancipatory visions'* (as opposed to imported theoretical emancipatory visions) (Motta, 2014:p5). That is to say, these new movements are constructing their own utopian paradigms through *'processes of mass intellectuality and creativity thereby enabling communities to reauthor themselves, their practices, and to reweave their worlds anew'* (ibid:p6). This emancipatory pedagogy, for Motta, serves to harness processes of subaltern intellectuality and creativity which are rooted in the *'embodied experiences of oppression and alienation'* (ibid:p8). Zibechi contends that through their prefigurative praxis social movements are not only engaged in contesting hegemonic power configurations, but are *'incubating the non-capitalist social relations of a different, alternative future'* (2012:p47).

Zibechi points out that the salient aspect of social movement pedagogy is not the methodology utilised, but rather the process itself and its embeddedness within the alternative social relations of the movements. He states that social movement education is by its nature

education in movement...what matters is neither what pedagogy is utilised, nor what model of schooling is pursued, but the climate and human relationships. Education is

no more and no less than a social climate embedded in social relations...the foundation is not a fixed identity, a physical place or a social role, but the human relations through which we share life' (Zibechi, 2012:p24 and 25)

Zibechi also highlights that the re-valorisation of culture and the affirmation of identity is central to the praxis of the movements which have emerged in Latin America, in contrast to the culturally homogenising drive of neoliberalism. He describes how these movements not only embrace, but also mobilise their cultural identities as tools within the struggle against elite power configurations. Both Zibechi and Escobar argue that these new Latin American social movements 'politicise difference' which for Zibechi means to *'become conscious of it. Collective self-awareness is what gives the community a vision of its role in the world. It is what Marx created for the working class.'* (ibid:p77). Escobar claims that Colombian social movements through their praxis overcome the notion of difference as weakness or a threat. He quotes an activist from the PCN in Colombia as saying 'differences are meant to enrich thought and action' (2008:p79). At the same time, Rivera Cusicanqui and Escobar have both warned of the dangers of fetishisation and essentialisation of identity in decolonial theory and praxis (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2018 & 2012; Escobar, 2007).

In recent years, the importance of emotions in understanding and explaining political action within the academic literature on social movements has been increasingly recognised (Jasper, 2011; Goodwin et al, 2009). Some authors have sought to explore and explain the ways in which social movements seek to harness emotions such as hope, love or anger within their praxis (Dinerstein, 2014). The increasing recognition of social movements as knowledge subjects has opened up important debates about the different types of embedded knowledge held by social movements, and hence increasingly emotions are recognised as playing a role within social struggle, as scholars have shown how social movements seek to harness emotion through their prefigurative praxis (ibid; Motta 2014; Motta and Esteves, 2014).

Motta explains that under Western modernist epistemology, emotionality has been construed as a feminised construct associated with the irrational, the unruly and the shameful - something to be controlled to avoid disruption to the normal and rational social and physic order' (Motta and Esteves, 2014:p2). There has perhaps been a tendency within critical thought to dismiss or overlook the role which emotion plays within struggles for social change, its role in social movement praxis, and the ways that social movements produce and reproduce their struggles. Some social movements have taken the same approach to emotionality and sought to ignore or repress it within their organising. Yet with the shift identified by Motta and Zibechi in recent years, increasingly social movements in Latin America have

actively engaged and integrated subjective, emotional and spiritual dimensions into their praxis of struggle (Zibechi, 2012; Motta, 2014; Motts and Esteves, 2014). The Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda employed the term 'sentipensante', which he attributed to peasant communities in the Colombian Caribbean. It refers to the need to bring together thought and feeling in order to think and live with the heart and the head. The term has been widely used within Latin American literature, and is posited as a remedy to the tendency within modernist thinking to separate these two realms, which Fals Borda argues is a false, damaging separation (Fals Borda, 1984).

The role of spirituality within social movement struggles in Latin America is another area which is often overlooked or arguably misunderstood by Western observers, but which has been significant in '*creating the conditions of emergence of counter-politics of knowledge of the oppressed*' (Motta and Esteves, 2014:p7). One tendency which has been particularly significant within social movement struggles across Latin America, and which has a strong connection to Colombia, is that of Liberation Theology within the Catholic church:

a radical and popular Catholic tradition characterised by an ethical commitment to the body of suffering poor, faith realised through action for the oppressed, the Bible reread collectively, a focus on direct access to the word of God, and a commitment to self-actualisation of the oppressed through their own liberation (Boff and Boff, 1987: 1–9 quoted in Motta y Esteves, 2014:p7)

One way in which emotion and indeed spirituality are often harnessed by Latin American social movements within their praxis is through *mística*: a concept which arises from social movements in Latin America, and hence is well known across the region, but which is still little known in western literature (Issa, 2016; Hammond, 2014). In relation to social movement praxis, *mística* is a term which has been used to refer to the 'abstract, emotional element, strengthened in collectivist movements, which can be described as the feeling of empowerment, love, and solidarity that serves as a mobilizing force by inspiring self-sacrifice, humility, and courage (Issa, 2016: p125). Thus understood, *mística* is a fundamental factor for the sustenance and reproduction of social struggle, since it generates and sustains hope in contexts where social movements are often in conflict with hegemonic political, economic and social forces.

Popular universities

The emphasis which Latin America's social movements place upon education has seen pedagogical initiatives take place in a wide range of formats. One rare but growing trend which is particularly relevant for this thesis is that of social movement universities, which have taken widely varying approaches, but

are invariably aimed at activists who form part of social movement struggles. Four prominent examples are linked to four well-known social struggles in South America: the struggle of indigenous communities in Oaxaca, Mexico; the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina; the international social movement platform the World Social Forum; and the Landless Workers Movement (*Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra – MST*) in Brazil. Each have varying approaches to pedagogy and organisational structures.

In Mexico, the University of the Land (Universidad de la Tierra) bases its educational approach on the thought of Ivan Illich, who was deeply critical of institutionalised education, and argued that pedagogy should instead be less structured, based on the freedom of the student to decide what to learn, and in knowledge sharing between those who have a knowledge or skill and those who want to learn it (Esteva, 2015). In Argentina, the National University Human Rights Institute, Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, is based on the desire of the mothers of the disappeared to keep alive their loved ones' dreams of social change, and to contribute to the cause. The pedagogical reference points for the university are Paolo Freire, and the work of the social psychologist Pichón-Rivière, which means an emphasis on collectivism and seeking collective rather than individual solutions to problems (Pichon-Riviere, 1997).

The Popular University of Social Movements (PUSM) is a 'counter-university' initiative which emerged from the World Social Forum in 2003, with the intention of 'enabling self-education of activists and leaders of social movements' (Santos, 2006:n.p.). In contrast to the other alternative universities mentioned herein, which tend to be tied to a particular place or places, the PUSM functions as an international network, with social movements around the world able to join and engage with the methodology and knowledge-sharing.

The MST is perhaps unique amongst social movements in the scale and nature of its approach to education. The movement runs a network of over 1200 schools, educating 150,000 children, and runs literacy programmes for 25,000 young people (McCowan, 2003). MST has leveraged its political power, forged through mobilising and organising, in order to engage with public institutions and ensure a collaboration which allows it to educate on a mass-scale. This includes collaboration with state universities which facilitate access to higher education for MST activists to study a tailor made degree programme designed to provide tools and knowledge beneficial to the MST's struggle for land. (Tarlau, 2019)

This initial section has provided a brief overview of the breadth of sociological approaches to understanding social movements. I believe that the most effective and useful approaches to the study of social movements are those which are able to overcome the binaries which have historically been used as trenches on different sides of theoretical and ideological divides. Hence I am most convinced by

approaches which are able to account for both structure and agency; which can develop an analysis which takes into account the structural, contextual factors which shape social movements and their struggles, and at the same time to emphasise the capacity of social movements to act upon and transform reality. This requires a deep attention to the human subject as a bearer of knowledge in all dimensions of its humanity, including emotion and culture.

Geographical takes on social movements

Significant contributions to social movement analysis have also emerged from the field of geography. These have focussed on understanding the spatial dimensions of social struggle, and have become even more pertinent over recent decades as processes of neoliberal globalisation have increasingly compressed space-time, integrating the global capitalist system and connecting populations. This increased interconnectivity has transformed patterns and modes of capitalist accumulation and exploitation; and has at the same time transformed the possibilities for subaltern resistance of workers and communities.

Central to geographical discussions of social movements is the question of scale, and how social movements manage to negotiate the eternal challenge of struggling on issues whose causes often have stretched spatialities across multiple locations and frontiers, engaging local, national and international scales. For Doreen Massey, the question of space (and the social production of space) is inextricably linked to the question of social relations: space can be understood as a stretched-out manifestation of social relations (Massey, 2013). Building upon a conceptualisation of place as an articulation point of local relations as well as those which stretch beyond it, Featherstone (2005) makes an important contribution to the conceptualisation place-based social struggles, or ‘militant particularisms’. He is critical of the way that accounts of radicalism, such as those of David Harvey (1996, 2000, 2001) or Raymond Williams (1979), have tended to bind struggles to a particular time and (local) space, hence misunderstanding the multiple interconnections which often influence political struggle:

I contest the ways in which Harvey follows Williams in defining militant particularisms as essentially bounded forms of political activity which need to be united to form a “more universal” politics (ibid:p252)

Featherstone describes the relational character of the processes through which militant particularisms develop, in which connections with other subjects of struggle play an important role. He describes militant particularisms as *‘the product of interrelations and as actively negotiating spatial relations rather than as fixed, bounded, origins of political struggles.’* (ibid, p250). These interconnections allow the development

of unbounded political identities and require us to rethink the rigidity of terms such as 'local' and 'universal' (*ibid*).

Labour geography is a strand of literature which emerged during the 1990s within the field of geography. Its proponents sought to correct what was perceived as a shortcoming on the part of critical geographers: the failure to give sufficient theoretical attention and importance to the agency of workers within capitalist societies (Herod 1998, 2001; Rutherford and Gertler, 2002; Waterman, 1999, 2004, 2005). Marxist and neo-classical geographers were criticised for having an overly capital-centric, and hence overly deterministic analysis (Peck, 2015). Herod argues that such approaches tend to relegate the role which workers, as organised labour, play in making the world and providing a counter-pressure which contests capital's strategies for accumulation in different ways (Herod, 1997:p3). Labour geographers hence focused upon the resistance and activism of workers and communities, prioritising the question of how workers '*actively produce economic spaces and scales in particular ways*' (Herod, 2001:p46).

Some authors have sought to provide geographical accounts of the spatial dimensions of social movement strategies (Escobar, 2006; Routledge, 2017; Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006; Harvey, 1997; Halvorsen et al, 2019). Escobar depicts the 'place-based struggles' of social movements as '*multi-scale, network-oriented subaltern strategies of localisation*' (Escobar, 2006:p139). He identifies two typologies of such strategies:

place-based strategies that rely on the attachment to territory and culture; and glocal strategies through meshworks that enable social movements to engage in the production of locality by enacting a politics of scale from below. Social movements engage in the politics of scale by engaging biodiversity networks, on the one hand, and through coalition making with other place-based struggles (*ibid*:p161)

One area of the geographical literature on social movements which is particularly pertinent to the discussion in this thesis relates to the ways in which social movements are themselves spatially configured in varying ways, and the social relations and processes which occur in the spaces or territories of social movements. Pickerill and Chatterton develop the notion of 'autonomous geographies' for such spaces, which could include anything from an occupied space such as a protest camp, to a territory. They argue that these are spaces in which

there is a desire to constitute non-capitalist, collective forms of politics, identity and citizenship... autonomous geographies are multi-scalar strategies that weave together spaces and times, constituting in-between and overlapping spaces, blending resistance and creation, and combining theory and practice (Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006:p1).

For many Latin American social movements over recent decades, the question of territory has been a central tenet of their struggle as well as their identities. Sam Halvorsen describes how such struggles, particularly of rural peasant and indigenous movements, are rooted in alternative conceptualisations of territory which contrast with Western understandings (Halvorsen, 2019). Halvorsen reminds us that:

Territory is not only produced by the modern state and dominant strategies of measuring and controlling from above; it is resisted, (re)appropriated and (re)defined in the course of diverse grassroots struggles. (ibid:p803).

The notion of ‘socio-territorial movements’ has been developed by the Brazilian geographer Fernandes (Fernandes, 2005). Fernandes uses this term to describe movements which *‘have as their central objective the appropriation of space in pursuit of their political project’*. (as described in Halvorsen et al, 2019: p1454)

Not only do such movements seek to hold territory, but the question of territory (and the struggle to obtain or retain it) is also central to the identity of socio-territorial movements. Four identifiable characteristics define socio-territorial movements:

First, territory is mobilised as the central strategy for realizing a movement’s aims. Second, territory informs the identity of socioterritorial movements, generating new political subjectivities. Third, territory is a site of political socialisation that produces new encounters and values. Fourth, through processes of territorialisation, deterritorialisation, and reterritorialisation, socioterritorial movements create new institutions... Although they necessarily engage with dominant state-based territories, socioterritorial movements are primarily oriented toward transforming sociospatial relations through the political control and appropriation of a demarcated space. (Halvorsen et al, 2019:, p1454, 1458)

Another dimension which has tended to be overlooked in social movement literature, but which is arguably crucial for an understanding of social movement learning and knowledge processes, is that of temporality. Scholars such as Motta & Bermudez (2019) and Gillan (2020) have made important contributions on this theme. Motta & Bermudez (2019) argue that the temporal dimension as central to the logic of colonial capitalist modernity, and hence as a central element of the ongoing domination and exploitation of peoples around the world.

I believe that geographical analyses of social movements bear important explanatory value for understanding social movements. My analysis in section two draws upon aspects of such geographical approaches to social movements, in particular the notion of socio-territorial movements. The following

section of this chapter turns to the growing body literature which engages with social movement knowledge.

1.2 Social movement knowledge

An important strand of literature for the case study in hand is that which engages specifically with issues related to the knowledge processes, practices and content of social movements. This is a relatively new area of concern for scholars of social movements, and can be traced to a broader epistemological debate on the issue of (de)colonisation of knowledge which has opened up within the social sciences which has huge axiological implications (and indeed the entire academic cannon). Over recent decades, this broader debate has called into question the epistemological foundations of Western academic theory, highlighting the epistemological dimension of colonialism, and pointing out the tendency of Eurocentric academic thought to exterminate, marginalise, co-opt and oppress alternative knowledges and forms of knowledge (Fanon, 2008; Fals Borda, 1970, Mignolo, 2002; Escobar, 2004; Santos, 1999,2007, 2010; Quijano, 1992; Lugones, 2010).

According to Argentinian theorist Walter Mignolo, '*Western expansion was not only economic and political but also educational and intellectual*' (2002:p63). For Mignolo and other critical decolonial scholars, the entire project of European colonialism and the establishment of the global capitalist system, relied upon these educational and intellectual dimensions. One of the most forthright contributors to these debates is Portuguese scholar-activist Boaventura De Sousa Santos, who has written extensively on the subject (Santos, 1999, 2007, 2010). Santos has over the years been very involved with social movement struggles around the world, and particularly in Latin America, hence his theoretical writing is especially relevant for this thesis and will be drawn upon for my theoretical framework in chapter 3. Santos highlights the way in which hegemonic Western epistemology operates so as to render alternative knowledges and forms of knowledge as invisible and non-existent (2010:p115). For Santos, the human understanding of the world

is much broader than the Western understanding of the world...Second, the diversity of the world is infinite. It is a diversity that encompasses very distinct modes of being, thinking and feeling, ways of conceiving of time and the relation among human beings and between humans and non-humans, ways of facing the past and the future and of collectively organising life, the production of goods and services, as well as leisure. This immensity of alternatives of life, conviviality and interaction with the world is largely wasted because the theories and concepts developed in the global North and employed in the entire academic world do not identify such alternatives. When they do, they do not valorise them as being valid contributions towards constructing a better society (Santos, 2012:p51)

Decolonial scholars call into question the subject-object divide upon which so much Western academic theory has been constructed, and in which the knowing academic subject studies the unknowing object (eg the social movement), as if the academic were somehow able to extricate themselves from the social reality which they observe. This subject-object relation has been referred to by Zibechi as *'perhaps modernity's most perverse heritage'* because it is central to the subjugation and oppression of alternative epistemologies which Santos describes (Zibechi, 2012:p54). Colombian scholar Arturo Escobar says that social movements *'have shown that [the] assumption of a single world with a single truth (a true legacy of colonialism) is one of the foundations of neoliberal globalisation'* (Escobar, 2020:p60). He proposes the concept of the 'pluriverse' which he borrows from the Zapatistas to define as *'a world in which many worlds fit'*. In other words, he calls for a social science which is able to recognise and engage with different ways of knowing and being (ibid). Argentinian decolonial theorist Catherin Walsh, meanwhile, posits 'interculturality' as a key principle for decolonial praxis (Walsh, 2017).

Hence, there has been growing recognition that the struggle for knowledge is an important terrain of the struggle for change, as social movements have been increasingly recognised as knowledge bearing subjects. Yet there remain relatively few attempts to comprehensively engage with the *'ontological and epistemological frameworks they produce while being engaged in social struggles'* (Chesters, 2012:p1). Some of the most sophisticated attempts to engage with the epistemological and ontological frameworks of social movements in recent years have come from Latin America, perhaps unsurprisingly given that it has been the stage for some of the most momentous social movement struggles of recent decades (Zibechi, 2007 and 2012 ; Escobar, 2008, 2020; Dinerstein, 2014).

It is important to make reference here to debates around 'ancestral knowledge', a concept which is used throughout this thesis. 'Ancestral' is a term which has become widely used within literature relating to social movements and decoloniality, particularly in Latin America (as well as within Colombian social movement spaces). However, it is a term whose definition does not find consensus within the literature; and surprisingly few academics take the time to define the term or to problematise the term and reflect upon the ambiguity of its usage. The Cambridge dictionary defines ancestral as *'relating to members of your family from the past'*. Yet within literature relating to social movement knowledge, as well as indigenous or Afro-descendent movements, there is a tendency to use the term in relation to the culture and knowledge of ethnic indigenous and afro-descendent communities and movements (Escobar, 2020; Betasamosake Simpson, 2020; Ararat et al, 2013).

For the purposes of this thesis, my understanding of ‘ancestral knowledge’ is based upon the way that the term is understood by the social movement participants in this research process. For them, it can be understood as knowledge which has been preserved within the communities down through the years, transmitted from generation to generation, principally through oral traditions. For indigenous peoples and Afro-descendants, that knowledge has survived the genocide of the Spanish invasion and slavery, and therefore is part of the history of struggle and resistance of their ancestors. This knowledge can be spiritual, practical, political, organisational etc: for example, alternative medicine using plants/herbs; the agricultural knowledge held by a peasant farmer of their seeds; or the rituals of indigenous or afro-descendant spirituality (Kane, ethnographic fieldnotes, 2018).

Lisifrey et al, Afro-Colombian activists from the La Toma community in Cauca, describe the way in which ‘ancestrality’ is deeply linked to their communities’ identity, and to their communities’ struggles of today: *‘the ancestrality which is defended here reflects a sense of belonging to the territory, a memory of the struggles and work of our ancestors, who left us this heritage’* (Ararat et al, 2013: p231).

Social movements as knowledge subjects

Scholars writing from the dominant theoretical paradigms in Western study of social movements (such as the structuralist North American tradition and the so-called NSM tradition discussed above), rooted in the epistemological foundations so criticised by Santos, had until relatively recently paid little attention to the knowledge processes of social movements. Furthermore, Choudry and Kapoor have argued that there has also been a tendency within academia of failing *‘to acknowledge the intellectual contributions of activism, or to recognise the lineages of ideas and theories that have been forged outside of academia, often incrementally, collectively and informally’* (2010:p2). Indeed, many academic disciplines have been heavily influenced by social movement and their struggles, including feminism, adult education, queer studies, decolonial theory (ibid). In recent years, no doubt spurred by the critique of Santos and others, there has been increasing recognition of social movements as knowledge bearing subjects. This recognition has been demonstrated by increasing and diverse attempts to engage with the knowledge produced and contained within social movements and their struggles. It is no longer controversial within mainstream social movement studies to state that social movements are prolific sites of knowledge production, and that the intellectual processes and content of social movements and the activists involved are highly valuable for critical academics (Della Porta and Pavan, 2017; Cox, 2014; Cox and Flesher Fominyana, 2009; Casa Cortes et al, 2008; Choudry, 2009, 2015; Chester, 2012).

Yet Chester has argued that there remains a tendency to view social movements as '*objects of knowledge for academics, rather than as knowledge producers in their own right*' (Chester, 2012:p1). This, he argues, can lead academics to take an interest in the knowledge produced by social movements on specific themes of interest to the academic, without taking into account what might be of interest and importance to the movements themselves, or their broader epistemological and ontological frameworks (ibid).

Casa Cortes et al have argued that social movement knowledge practices are increasingly blurring the boundaries between activist and academic or expert knowledges. She contends that contemporary movements are:

- 1) engaging in co-producing, challenging and transforming expert scientific discourses;
- 2) creating critical subjects whose embodied discourse produces new notions of democracy; and 3) generating reflexive conjunctural theories and analyses that go against more dogmatic and orthodox approaches to social change. (Casa Cortes et al, 2008:p22).

Della Porta and Pavan and Casa Cortes et al use the term 'knowledge practices' in order to engage in the discussion around social movement knowledge. Hence, Della Porta and Pavan claim that it is possible to discern '*repertoires of knowledge practices*' within social movements, which can be understood as sets of practices

...that result from and, at the same time, foster the coordination of disconnected, local, and highly personal experiences, rationalities, and competences within a shared cognitive system, able to provide movements and their supporters with a common orientation for making claims and acting collectively to produce social, political and cultural changes. (Della Porta and Pavan, 2017: p305)

An important feature of literature on social movement knowledge is that of the role of collective memory. A range of literature exists, across multiple disciplines, on the role of collective historical memory within social movements (Eyerman, 2015; Kubal and Becerra, 2014; Doerr, 2014; Zamponi, 2013; Bhandar and Ziadah, 2020; Choudry and Valley eds, 2017, Rivera Cusicanqui, 2018b).

What's special about social movement knowledge?

A common shortcoming amongst the different attempts from within Western social movement literature to theorise social movement knowledge is the tendency to underplay or even ignore the importance of the relationship between social movement knowledge production and broader political, social, economic and cultural contexts and processes. In their quest to arrive at universally applicable levels of abstraction and conceptualisation, scholars have tended to extricate social movement knowledge processes from the

contexts and realities which gave rise to them in the first place. To develop an understanding of social movements within their broader social contexts and realities requires an understanding of the power dynamics which underpin the social relations between social movements and the hegemonic forces within society. Casa Cortes et al, who draw upon both Gramsci and Foucault, argue that social movement knowledge practices are

politically crucial, both because of the inextricable relationship between knowledge and power and because of the uniquely situated locations of these practices...in so far as knowledge practices are forged in fields of power, to claim social movements as knowledge-makers has political significance. (Casa Cortes et al, 2008:p246)

For Hilary Wainwright (1994), part of the reason orthodox Marxism struggled to understand the social movements which emerged in the 1960s was because it failed to grasp the emotional and subjective dimensions of power. For power, you could also read knowledge: when knowledge has been taken into account by many scholars of social movements (whether orthodox Marxists, structural functionalists or NSM theorists), there has arguably been a failure to understand and value the different modes and types of knowledge which they may hold, and their importance to processes which seek to build counter-power. To the extent that Western social movement literature has engaged with social movement knowledge, there has been a tendency of some theorists to understand such knowledge as informal, anecdotal, or testimony, counterposing it to expert, professional or academic knowledge. Yet more recently scholars have come to recognise the limitations of such characterisations and the way that they can often serve to devalue the knowledges in question and reproduce epistemological hierarchies. Casa Cortes et al argue that the socially embedded nature of social movement knowledge, rooted in the experiences of those on the frontlines of the struggles against macro-processes, such as neoliberal globalisation or climate change, is precisely what makes it valuable (Casa Cortes et al, 2008). This understanding of social movement knowledge as situated and place-based is an important aspect to understand how social movements knowledge can be seen to be embedded within social reality and hence of immense value to social sciences. Wainwright has described how the activity of social movements is able to draw upon tacit knowledge based upon praxis and experience (including of suffering) in order to weave more elaborate knowledge forms (1994). At the same time, there has been increasing recognition of the importance of the cultural and emotional dimensions of social movement knowledge: dimensions which have historically been somewhat overlooked by Western strands of Marxist theory. Significant work has emerged from Latin America which has theorised the cultural and emotional dimensions of knowledge in relation to social movements and struggles against epistemological domination (Escobar, 2007; Motta, 2014; Rivera

Cusicanqui, 2012&2018; Leyva Solano y Icaza, 2019, Bhandar & Ziadah, 2020). We now turn to the vital question of the ways in which social movements seek to harness knowledge processes within their struggles, and clearly the question of learning must be central to such a debate. Perhaps the most obvious, and methodical manner is through their own pedagogical initiatives, aimed at creating or deepening critical consciousness amongst their members and sometimes the broader population. Hence, the following section focusses on literature around the themes of learning, praxis and pedagogy within social movements.

1.3 Social movement learning: pedagogy and praxis

Having explored the various strands of literature and debates surrounding social movement knowledge, this section moves onto a discussion of social movement learning processes. It begins by surveying the contributions provided by the field of radical adult education towards an understanding of social movement learning. It goes on to present a discussion on the ways that social movements harness learning processes through pedagogy and praxis.

Social movement learning literature

Alongside the developments within the field of social movement studies already mentioned during the 1990s and into the 2000s, scholars from radical adult education traditions began to pay more attention to social movements (Kilgore, 1999; Hake, 2000; Holst, 2002; Hall et al, 2012; Krinsky and Barker, 2009; Nilsen 2006, 2010; Scandrett, 2012; Choudry 2009, 2012, 2015; Choudry and Kapoor, 2010; Langdon, 2009, 2011, 2011a; Harley, 2012; Novelli, 2004a, 2004b, 2007, 2010; Novelli and Ferus-Comelo, 2010). In seeking to produce research which is relevant to movements, what could be of more relevance than the very processes through which activists become politicised and through which movements ultimately develop and reproduce themselves? Whilst this saw an upsurge in research and writing on social movement learning processes and strategies, Choudry and Vally argue that the '*educative role of social movements and social and political activism are still often overlooked within education and social movement scholarship*' (2018:p3). Even more rare is the recognition that many social movements are already engaged in producing theory of their own, based on collective reflection upon praxis. Important attempts have been made to critically theorise adult learning from a historical materialist perspective which have sought to understand the interconnected relationships between education, learning, activism, struggle and social change (Youngman 1986; Foley 1999; Allman 2010; Holst 2002; Scandrett 2012; Carpenter and Mojab

2012). Choudry and Vally argue that '*activist research, education and action are dialectically related*', and hence dispute their theoretical separation (2018:p3).

Forms of learning: how to understand learning in social movements?

Learning and knowledge production processes within social movements are embedded within practice and struggle (Choudry, 2015; Harley and Scandrett, 2019; Scandrett, 2012). Social movement learning may take place through structured educational processes, or informal and incidental learning (Foley, 1999). Scholars such as Foley, Choudry and Scandrett have argued that often organised educational spaces may not be where the most valuable learning processes take place within social movements, and hence emphasise the need to take seriously the informal and incidental education learning processes which occur within the context of social movement struggles (Choudry, 2015; Foley, 1999; Scandrett, 2012). Foley has underlined the need to develop '*an understanding of learning in popular struggle*' (1999:p140). For Foley, learning very often takes place in an unstructured, unconscious way, however he argues that a process of critical learning involves people then standing back and:

theorising their experience: they stand back from it and reorder it, using concepts like power, conflict, structure, values and choice. It is also clear that critical learning is gained informally, through experience, by acting and reflecting on action, rather than in structured courses (Foley, 1999:p64).

According to Novelli, this recognition requires that we broaden our understanding of what we mean by popular education, to include the way that social movements instrumentalise those:

bigger processes, which, though appearing "informal" and "arbitrary," is very deliberate. In this definition, both "popular education" events and the actual practice of "strategy development" and "protest actions" can be seen as examples of popular education, whereby the "school" (the social movement) learns (Novelli, 2010:p167).

Scandrett points out that incidental learning can often have the '*character of dialogical interrogation of knowledge which leads to the process of critical analysis which Freire calls conscientiation*' (2012:p43).

The most comprehensive contribution to social movement learning literature thus far has come from Aziz Choudry. He contends that informal and formal learning processes should be understood as a continuum rather than a binary (Choudry, 2015). In line with the alternative accounts of knowledge production within the previous section, Choudry argues that this situated understanding of learning also requires the recognition that '*people struggle, learn, educate and theorise wherever they find themselves*' (2015:p40). He also draws upon Freire in order to highlight the generative, creative learning dimension of dialogue:

dialogue is a *'creative exchange through which new understandings are generated'* (ibid:p102). People (including social movement activists) learn through interactions as well as reflection both with each other and with past (collective and individual) experiences. Choudry also stresses the importance of collective memory of previous struggles to learning processes within social movements, arguing that stronger social movements are those which actively seek to remember and learn from previous struggles (Choudry, 2015).

Choudry goes one step further than Bevington and Dixon's case for movement-relevant theory, and makes the case for movement-generated theory. He calls for research into social movement learning which is *'engaged and critically sympathetic, but unromantic'* (2015:p11). Foley, meanwhile, states that any analysis of social movement learning processes must also recognise the *'complex, ambiguous and contradictory'* character of particular movements and struggles (Foley,1999,p143). Indeed, activism is not automatically emancipatory, and may serve to reproduce power dynamics reflected within wider society (Choudry, 2015).

Within the calls of various authors for the theory and knowledge which is produced and contained within social movements to be taken seriously, there is an underlying critique of the Eurocentrism of mainstream academic theory, and a call for epistemological decolonisation (Kapoor, 2007,2009; Choudry, 2015; Harley, 2012; Langdon, 2011). Indeed, Kapoor claims that scholars within the radical adult education field have tended to lack recognition of the differentness of the contexts, histories and identities which shape the learning processes of social movements in the Global South (Kapoor, 2007). More studies of this kind are imperative in the search for alternatives to the neoliberal paradigm.

One rare example of genuine engagement with social movement learning and knowledge processes to produce 'movement-generated theory' is offered by Novelli, who provides detailed analysis of the use of 'strategic pedagogy' by the Sintraemcali union in Cali, Colombia. Novelli documents how the union was able to build mass grassroots support and strong solidarity bonds between workers and communities (service users) with strategic pedagogy as a key pillar in an integral strategy (Noveli, 2004, 2006, 2007, 2010). It was the 'strategic pedagogical' work of Sintraemcali that laid the foundations for Nomadesc's human rights popular education with conflict-affected communities across the southwest region of Colombia. Nomadesc's team included some of the protagonists in the design and implementation of Sintraemcali's successful strategy. Despite the contributions outlined above, the literature on social movement learning remains a relatively new strand of research, and Choudry (2015) and Scandrett (2012) are right to refer to it as an under-researched area.

Social movement praxis and pedagogy

I understand praxis as the enjoining of thought and action: the deployment of human intellectual faculties in order to guide action. Clearly, this question is one of vital importance when it comes to social movements, because it relates to the ways in which movements organise their actions in order to seek social change. In relation to political action of social movements, Freire defines praxis as simply '*reflection and action directed at the structures to be transformed*' (1968: p126).

Social movement praxis is central to how movements learn and (re)construct knowledge. It includes deliberate attempts to harness knowledge processes, such as structured pedagogical initiatives, as well as mobilisations, interactions with the state or other actors, and everyday organising activities. Of particular relevance to considerations of social movement knowledge and learning processes are the *ways* in which social movements consciously seek to harness such processes in order to strengthen their struggles, through structured educational initiatives and also through the learning and knowledge processes which occur in the course of their everyday organising. As established above, when it comes to social movement learning, a broader conception of pedagogy is required in order to grasp the ways in which social movements harness knowledge processes through their praxis.

This section provides a discussion of literature relating to the two dimensions mentioned above: social movement pedagogy and praxis. It begins with a brief discussion of popular education. It goes on to provide a brief discussion of the thinking of different African and Latin American radical intellectuals who have been part of, inspired and in some cases led important struggles, and whose writings on praxis and pedagogy have been influential for revolutionary social movements across the world.

In Latin America, Paulo's Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed, based upon his own experience as an activist educator, inspired social movements across the region and continues to be an important reference point today. African revolutionaries such as Amilcar Cabral, Frantz Fanon, and Steve Biko provided highly valuable theoretical contributions around revolutionary praxis and knowledge processes, based upon their own experiences and praxis in struggles against colonialism and apartheid (Biko, 2015; Cabral, 1974, 1979; Fanon, 2007). All of the intellectuals mentioned were influenced by Marxism to differing degrees, and all were original thinkers who based their writings upon their own experiences of struggle.

A critical understanding of pedagogy

Pedagogy is a term whose use has become abundant, yet whose meaning and status have changed over time and across different cultures (Murphy, 2003). Despite the lack of consensus over its meaning, it is a term whose definition is often taken as read within academic literature. A brief discussion is of value here in order to lay out the understanding of pedagogy which underpins this thesis.

In the Cambridge dictionary, pedagogy is defined as *'the study of the methods and activities of teaching'*. Such a definition is reflective of more mainstream, narrow understandings of pedagogy, which has historically been conceptualised in relation to the methods and theories of formal education and issues such as classroom management, with links to child psychology and positivist epistemological underpinnings (Merleau-Ponty, M, 2010; Murphy, 2003). Yet, as with any other human activity, pedagogy does not occur within a vacuum: it must be understood in relation to the broader social context and melee of social relations in which it takes place. Fichsman and McClaren argue that *'both the failures and successes of education are constructed in and through people's linguistic, cultural, social, and behavioral interactions, which are constrained and enabled by social relations of production and dominant cultural formations, ideological apparatuses, and institutional practices'* (2005:p425). Scholars of critical pedagogy propose a broader understanding of 'pedagogy' which extends beyond formal education. They seek to problematise:

the relationship between education and politics, between sociopolitical relations and pedagogical practices, between the reproduction of dependent hierarchies of power and privilege in the domain of everyday social life and that of classrooms and institutions. (ibid: p425)

Hence, pedagogy may serve to reinforce, or to undermine, the prevailing status quo of power relations within society. Decolonial scholar Sara Motta draws upon Gramsci to remind us that the construction of hegemony is necessarily a pedagogical process, since constructing consent to domination amongst the subaltern classes involves learning subjectivities, world views and ways of relating (Motta, 2014).

This conceptualisation of pedagogy brings into focus the role of the institutions which form part of the construction and reproduction of hegemony, including the mass media, formal education, organised religion, etc. Drawing upon the work of Gramsci and Freire, Fichsman and McClaren point to the way in which *'ideologies connected to a broader system of intelligibility linked to the cultural logic of capitalism contribute to the development of hegemonic relations and regimes and are dialectically co-constructed by*

individuals and the social classes, groups, and institutions of which they are a part' (Fichsman and McClaren, 2005: p426). That is to say, the hegemonic pedagogical apparatus ensures that the oppressed masses adopt the values of the ruling class, ensuring their consent and participation in the reproduction of hegemony.

Such an understanding of the pedagogical nature of hegemony implies that the construction of counter-hegemony must also be a pedagogical process. As agents engaged in struggles which seek to build counter-hegemony, the praxis of social movements requires a broad conceptualisation of pedagogy. Motta argues that the:

The pedagogical practices of social movements therefore have two moments; one to deconstruct and rupture dominant pedagogies of epistemological and ontological denial by appearing as knowing-subjects. The other moment is the affirmative co-construction of becoming otherwise to these logics as communities and subjects. (Motta, 2014:p5)

Social movement education initiatives and broader pedagogical processes tend to seek to bring together learning, reflection and social action. Della Porta and Pavan emphasise that *'informal pedagogical processes are often at the heart of the consolidation and sustainability of movement culture, relationships, institutions, identity and strategies'* (2017:p11). Social movement education processes are geared towards enhancing the capacity of activists and collectives to bring about social change, and hence tend to seek a rupture with the status quo rather than to integrate participants into it, as is the case with institutional education processes. They seek to sustain and reproduce struggles by developing the critical consciousness of activists, both new and established. Important contributions have been made which seek to engage with the pedagogical dimensions of social movement praxis, and to understand the role which such processes play in the formation of counter-hegemonic struggles for social change, in sustaining activism, and in enabling social movements to more effectively confront power structures (Motta, 2014; Motta and Esteves, 2014; Langdon et al, 2014; Harley, 2014; Cox, 2014).

Popular education and Paolo Freire

Perhaps the most influential examples of theory and praxis around the pedagogy of struggle have emerged from Latin America. Popular education as understood in this thesis emerged in Latin America in the 1960s with the rapid spread of the influence of Brazilian educator Paolo Freire's work. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Freire's methods were adopted by thousands of movements and organisations across Latin America and beyond, and they remain hugely influential today.

Freire wrote at a time in which revolutionary struggles were taking place across the world, including anti-colonial national liberation wars in Africa, and left-wing revolutionary armed and popular struggles in Latin America. He maintained a keen interest in such struggles and engaged in intellectual exchange and dialogue with revolutionaries around the world, and his work influenced the praxis of figures such as Biko and Cabral (Msila, 2013). Freire's educational model began with a rejection of traditional notions of teacher/student roles and what he called the 'banking model' of education, where the teacher imparts knowledge upon the student. Instead he emphasised the value of the experience and knowledge of every single person, and proposed a dialogical 'conscientisation' process in which participants are encouraged to interrogate the reality of their own situation of oppression in order to ultimately act upon it and transform it (Freire, 1968). Furthermore, the experience of oppression meant that only the oppressed subject really understood the reality of society's structures of oppression. (ibid:p45)

Freire argued that the struggle for social change is itself an inherently pedagogical process which reverses the dehumanisation inflicted by the (capitalist) system of oppression, '*the struggle to become more fully human has already begun in the authentic struggle to transform the situation*' (Freire, 1968:p44). Hence, pedagogy has a central role to play in any process which seeks social change.

In the multiplicity of popular education approaches which have emerged, there has long been an interest in research strategies which are able to in some way capture the collective political and social knowledge production processes which often take place within processes of popular education, and which are in line with the epistemological and political standpoints associated with popular education (Torres Carrillo, 2010). This has meant much overlap between popular education and participatory research, as methods and strategies of participatory research have been developed to be implemented within popular education contexts (ibid). The most prominent example here is the work Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda, whose 'participatory action research' technique has been hugely influential and recognised as one of the most commonly-employed techniques within popular education, especially in Latin America (Fals Borda, 1979, 1987). Fals Borda's participatory action research technique has influenced the development of Nomadesc's popular education programme.

In the same vein, during the 1990s a participatory popular education research method known as the 'systematisation of experiences' gained prominence within the field of Latin American popular education. Based on the recognition that unique, valuable knowledge can be produced through popular education processes, the systematisation of experiences is a collective process which seeks to deepen understanding

and improve practice through collective reflection and analysis of experience (Jara, 1997, 2015; Kane, 2012; Torres Carrillo, 2010) There exist a range of different systematisation methodologies, however it can be understood as an intentional, collective process of knowledge production which tries to *'recover and interpret the meanings that manifest themselves in social practices, with the purpose of strengthening them'* (Torres Carrillo, 2010: p196). The systematisation of experiences methodology was employed for this research project, and hence is discussed in detail in chapter 3.

Revolutionary praxis: knowledge emerging from struggle

What can we draw from the writings of revolutionary intellectuals around the issue of social movement praxis and knowledge/learning processes? A common theme which emerges from the writings of movement intellectuals is the importance of linking together thought and action. Amilcar Cabral argued that:

some have limited themselves to acting without thinking and others have lots of ideas without doing anything in practice. We must be able to bring together these two basic elements: thought and action, action and thought (Cabral, 1979:p80).

For Walter Rodney, it was a question of joining action and reflection together, *'there should be no false distinctions between reflection and action [within revolutionary praxis]'* (Rodney, 2019:p53). This emphasis on 'thinking in order to do', may sound rather straightforward, yet it has substantial implications for both social movements and critical scholars, calling upon both to seek to understand the interconnected relationship between the everyday experiences of subjects engaged in struggle, learning, and knowledge production. For Ella Baker, a prominent black feminist and popular educator in the civil rights movement, social movements had to learn to develop their own critical analysis in order to:

learn to think in radical terms. I use the term radical in its original meaning—getting down to and understanding the root cause. It means facing a system that does not lend itself to your needs and devising means by which you change that system. (Baker, quoted in Ransby, 2003)

Cabral argued that knowledge and understanding of reality was central to the capacity of humans to transform their reality. For him, it was vital that those involved in the struggle for emancipation took the time to truly understand social reality as it truly is, rather than as they presume it to be, *'I cannot presume to organise a struggle in accordance with what I have in my head. It must be in accordance with the specific reality of the land'* (Cabral, 1979:p44). This notion of coming to understand reality in order to transform it is central to the thinking of all of the scholar activists briefly discussed here.

Revolutionary writers such as Fanon, Cabral, Biko and Freire had a keen appreciation of the deep cultural and epistemological structures of colonialism. They recognised the racist subjugation of cultures and knowledge systems which had occurred for generations in Africa and Latin America, and which existed in order to sustain the structures of exploitation which their various struggles sought to overturn. That is to say, the pedagogical processes which constituted the construction of hegemony in colonial contexts were particularly pernicious. Fanon in particular devoted much of his writing to his analysis of the deep impacts upon collective psychology of colonised peoples which had been inflicted over generations (Fanon, 2007, 2008). Aside from the systematic denigration, impoverishment and discrimination of the black population, Fanon argued that colonialism had also imposed a European, individualist-based paradigm of social relations, undermining the collective basis of social relations (Fanon, 2007). Hence, all of them were attuned to the importance of the cultural and subjective dimensions of the struggle, and their writings provide important insights into these themes. A more recent contribution in this regard comes from Bhandar and Ziadah, who through a series of interviews with revolutionary feminist scholar-activists, engage with varying feminist political lineages, frames of analysis, concepts and modes of praxis from around the world. These interviews provide valuable insights and ways of understanding the cultural, emotional and spiritual dimensions of praxis and struggle (Bhandar & Ziadah, 2020).

For both Paulo Freire and Steve Biko, the realisation on the part of the oppressed of their capacity to transform reality is tied to the process of subjects coming to consciousness (or what Freire called 'conscientisation'). Both were clear that for the oppressed subject to gain consciousness, it was not enough for them to become more aware of the injustices of social reality and the structures which oppressed them: they must come to believe in the possibility of something different, which means that they must have hope. For Biko, consciousness is a process of '*rekindling hope*'. For Biko, Fanon and Freire, an important starting point for any struggle is that of overcoming the psychological damage and limitations which the visible and invisible structures of oppression have over time inflicted upon the collective mindset of the oppressed. For Biko, Black Consciousness means that the black man (sic) has to '*come to himself...to infuse him with pride and dignity.... This is what we mean by an inward-looking process*' (Biko, 2015:p29). For each of the writers mentioned, an important aim within the praxis of struggle should be providing participants- the oppressed- with a sense of dignity and confidence in themselves (and in their capacity to transform reality).

To different degrees, each of the writers in question dealt with the role of the intellectual in relation to the masses, within the revolutionary struggle, and the extent of directivity which is required from the

leadership. This is an age old and important issue with questions of revolutionary theory and praxis. From their writings, it is clear that Cabral, Fanon and to a lesser extent Biko tended towards 'vanguardism' with an enlightened, theorised group of intellectuals responsible for leading the masses in the struggle, with varying but usually quite limited levels of internal democracy and participation. In reality, such caricatures rarely capture the complex reality of the nature of the relationship between leaders/intellectuals and masses, and a detailed discussion is beyond our scope. This question has important implications for the manner in which social movements undertake education, and the role which it plays within their struggle. Della Porta and Pavan argue that there is a marked:

difference between (some) past and contemporary movements, with the former putting more emphasis on controlling and transmitting ideology and the latter more involved in promoting horizontal and de-specialised forms of education aimed at empowering members and citizens at large' (Della Porta and Pavan, 2017:p308).

Cabral wrote, '*Nobody has yet carried out a successful revolution without a revolutionary theory*', (Cabral, 1979:p123). Hence there is a sense that the revolutionary path was contained within ideological theory produced by intellectuals (including themselves), as opposed to being collectively constructed within the struggle itself.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented a broad overview of relevant areas, themes and debates relating to the praxis, learning and knowledge processes of social movements, in order to locate my own thesis research in relation to existing literature. Despite an increase in recent years, there remains insufficient engagement with the knowledge frameworks and learning processes of social movements within academic literature, and the intellectual production of social movements continues to be undervalued by social scientists. In particular, it is important that social scientists prioritise sustained research collaboration with social movements in the Global South. Contexts of struggle in the Global South produce unique, valuable knowledge and learning processes for critical social scientists who are able to genuinely listen and engage with the social movements as subjects rather than object. There is a need for more research which comes from active participation within movements, and producing what Choudry refers to as '*movement-generated*' theory. There is also a need for more research which is able to draw out the role of subjective and prefigurative dimensions of social movement praxis within struggle, without abstracting social movements from the broader political economy contexts in which their struggles take place

Chapter 2: Context chapter

The Colombian context for social movements and their organising is uniquely intense. A country with diverse, vibrant social movements and significant levels of social protest, it is also frequently the most dangerous country in the world for activists, who are regularly targeted for assassination. This chapter presents an overview of the contextual background to this case study. It aims to provide the reader with an understanding of the historical, political, economic and cultural contexts in which Nomadesc emerged and exists. I trace a series of historical continuities which have defined the country's history, and which help to understand the challenging context of social movement organising. The insights in this chapter will serve to locate the pedagogical initiative within the histories, processes and conjunctures of the country and the southwest region, and hence to deepen an understanding of the process as a whole.

2.1 Violence, plunder and wealth concentration: Locating Colombia's political economy

Historical continuities

Colombia is a country with an abundance of valuable natural resources such as gold, carbon, nickel, oil and water. It is also one of the world's leading producers of coffee, bananas and flowers. The country occupies an important geostrategic position at the Northern tip of South America, and its vast and diverse territories include 3 Andean mountain *cordilleras*, Pacific and Caribbean coastal regions, Amazon rainforest, the *llanos* or plains region, as well as a series of islands in the Caribbean and Pacific oceans. These varied and challenging terrains have historically made it difficult for the Colombian state to effectively project its authority across swathes of the national territory, leading to existence of prioritised zones and regions, and peripheral zones which have historically seen little state presence or investment. These peripheral zones have historically been sites of subaltern resistance and have been defended vigorously against would-be usurpers by the diverse rural communities which inhabit them. Such peripheral territories are the principal theatre of the Colombian armed conflict, as well as the illegal economy of the illicit drugs trade, particularly cocaine, of which Colombia is the world's leading producer (current leading Nomadesc member, interview, 2018; Richani, 2007).



Figure 2.1: Map of Colombia. Source: www.mapsopensesource.com

The Colombia of today is characterised by a series of continuities which can be traced back to the European conquest of America in 1492, bringing practices of genocide, slavery, exploitation (of people, environment and natural resources and domination (De las Casas, 1992; Galeano, 1973). The arrival of the Spanish marked the beginning of the continuity which above all others has influenced Colombia's political, economic and cultural destiny both during colonial times and during the current period of independence: that of intervention by foreign colonial and imperialist powers.

Colombian society's modern demographics can only be understood in reference to the genocidal colonial rule of the Spanish, both in terms of the ethnic cultural mix within the population, and also in terms of the racialised socio-economic hierarchy which continues to exist today. Colombia today has a population of around 50 million people (DANE, 2019), including 84 indigenous ethnic groups (DANE, 2005). According to the 2018 census, the population is made up of an estimated 85% white or *mestizo*/mixed race people; 9.34 Afro-Colombian people; 4.4% indigenous people; and 0.01 Roma people (DANE 2019). These figures unfortunately do not differentiate the white and *mestizo* populations and hence fail to capture an important aspect of the demographic. *Mestizo* is a term which encapsulates the majority of the population, most of whom represent some mixture of the different ethnic groups. In rural areas, many poor rural campesinos or peasants are classified as mestizos yet have over generations developed a

cultural identity of their own, arguably deserving of their own ethnic and socio-political category. The predominance of the mestizo category is also the result of policies of acculturation implemented by the Spanish colonisers, but also during the independence period until the beginning of the 20th Century (Vega Cantor, 2002b).

Colombia gained independence from Spain in 1819, and slavery was abolished by independent Colombia in 1851, yet the legacy of colonialism lives on: the continued racial stratification of society is clearly evident today. Colombia's political and economic elites are overwhelmingly white. Well into the 20th Century, these elites actively sought to:

destroy black and indigenous communities, offering them as an alternative their integration and mixing with other ethnic groups, which implied losing their community links and the disappearance of their communitarian ancestral lands, and their substitution with private property' (Vega Cantor, 2002a,p115).

The country's Afro-Colombian population, directly descended from enslaved Africans forcibly brought by the Spanish, and the indigenous populations, tend to live in peripheral territories of the type mentioned above, with little engagement from the state other than being disproportionately affected by the armed conflict.

A second continuity which can be traced throughout Colombia's history are the numerous modes of accumulation, appropriation and co-optation of resources and democratic institutions which have by the country's elites:

Separating communities from their lands and traditional territories and limiting access to them through the systematic exercise of violence alongside policies of appropriation...of lands (Fajardo, 2015:p6).

These processes have been closely related to the various phases of the implementation and deepening of capitalism within Colombia. Hence, connected to these processes is a third historical continuity: the systematic, widespread use of brutal elite violence and repression, which underpinned the Spanish invasion and occupation is a continuous feature of political and social life in Colombia, and a key characteristic of class relations in the country. Forming the other side of a dialectic with this violence and repression has been a fourth historical continuity which has characterised the country since the Spanish invasion until present times: the resistance and agitating of those subaltern classes who have for centuries struggled against domination and exploitation.

The roots of civil war

Colombia's little more than 200 years since independence have seen numerous internal armed conflicts. From the 1960s, a series of left-wing armed guerrilla movements have fought a low intensity, but brutal internal civil conflict against an authoritarian state apparatus and ultra-right wing paramilitaries which operate on behalf of economic and political elites and in collaboration with elements of the state (Giraldo 2004, Molano, 2015; Richani 2005, 2007, Sarmiento 2013). The largest insurgent organisation, FARC (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*), signed a peace agreement in 2018, however the conflict continues with the second largest guerrilla group (Ejercito de Liberacion Nacional - ELN), as well as another small guerrilla organisation and various dissident factions of former FARC fighters.

Whilst the beginning of the conflict is identified with the emergence of the revolutionary armed struggles of the FARC and ELN in the 1960s, the processes which are credited with its genesis can be traced back to the 1920s (Fajardo, 2015; Giraldo, 2015; Molano, 2015; Vega Cantor, 2002a, 2002b, 2002c. This period was one of capitalist transition and increased social conflict in the country, as the economy underwent a process of economic reform and industrialisation. This period increasingly saw:

the imposition of conditions of super-exploitation in labour relations, and the exclusion from the access to land and political participation, and the distinct forms of resistance of communities and workers to these living conditions (Fajardo, 2015:p47).

The process of industrialisation in urban areas, and a renewed offensive by landowning elites and national capital to appropriate land in rural areas, would assist the emergence of important social movements and struggles, and bring about a period of renewed social resistance and political militancy. This period saw the emergence of a militant trade union movement which led important strikes around the country during the 1920s and into the 1930s including in the operations of multinational companies such as the United Fruit Company and Tropical Oil, as well as peasant struggles revolving around demands for land and for the abolition of 'terraje' rent payments to hacienda landlords which reflected feudal serf-type arrangements (Vega Cantor; 2002a; Giraldo, 2015; Molano, 2015). The indigenous communities of Cauca and Tolima also found a renewed militancy between the 1914 and the 1940s under the leadership of Quintin Lame, who led struggles for the recuperation and respect of indigenous territories and against the payment of 'terraje' (Molano, 2014; Giraldo, 2014; Bonilla, 2015). All of these struggles were invariably met with heavy violence and repression by authorities. This period up until the 1940s also saw the formation of armed peasant self-defence groups in response to the violence of landlords (Molano, 2014).

La Violencia

La Violencia was a particularly intense period of internal armed conflict in Colombia that ran between 1948 and 1966, and which claimed around 200,000 victims and displaced at least two million people from the countryside (Guzman Campos et al, 1968). Colombian sociologist Alfredo Molano argues that *La Violencia* had its roots in the aforementioned period of deepening social conflict during the 1920s. Ostensibly an intra-class conflict between the two political parties of the ruling class, the Liberal Party and the Conservative party, it was a conflict which was fought predominantly in rural areas between poor peasant communities.

La Violencia played an important role in consolidating capitalist configurations of power and patterns of accumulation, following a period in which organised subaltern classes had become an important political force within the country:

The economic function [of *La Violencia*] is indisputable, and is essential to an understanding of the historical form of the process of capitalist accumulation and the social conflict of this period. To reduce analysis to a question of fratricidal inter-party war would be to see it as independent of said process and to overlook the great economic, political and socio-political transition which took place in the country [during this period]. *La Violencia* played an ordering role in the unfolding and expansion of the social capitalist relation; activated mechanisms of social control and discipline; and destroyed struggles and forms of resistance -although it unleashed others, including armed resistance and the armed struggle. (Estrada, 2015:p9)

Hence, *La Violencia* also played an important catalytic role in terms of both dissolving some social struggles and generating others. When it came to an end in 1958, rather than create a democratic opening, the two ruling parties instead formed a pact known as the National Front (*Frente Nacional*) to ensure that the door to democratic renewal would remain firmly shut. The parties agreed to rotate power, changing president every four years. Meanwhile, despite the outbreak of peace between the two ruling parties, the violence continued against rural peasants (Torres, 1967,p72).

The *Frente Nacional* lasted until 1974, and it was during this period that a flurry of guerrilla movements emerged in order to seek revolutionary social change via the armed struggle, beginning the period of armed conflict which continues into the present. Both the FARC and the ELN guerrilla movements were formed in 1964.

Patterns of accumulation

The patterns of accumulation in Colombia, in particular relating to concentration of land ownership and the class conflict which is endogenous to the capitalist system, have been essential in sustaining the armed conflict (Fajardo, 2015; Molano, 2015; Giraldo, 2015; Estrada Alvarez, 2015). Colombia has one of the highest rates of inequality in the world, with a Gini coefficient of 50.4 (World Bank Gini Index, 2018). An estimated 27.8% of the population lives below the poverty line (Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadísticas, 2016), and 47% work in informal employment (DANE, 2020). Each of these figures are likely underestimates, particularly given the dramatic impact of the COVID 19 pandemic on increasing poverty and inequality in the global South (World Bank, 2021).

As a result of the violence, Colombia has almost 8 million internal refugees, more than any other country in the world (UNHCR, 2018). In 2017 the INGO OXFAM reported that 81% of the Colombian national territory is owned by the top 1% of the largest farms (OXFAM, 2017). In 2013, a government commission investigation found that at least 8 million hectares, or 14% of Colombian territory, was acquired illegally (Centro Nacional de Memoria Historica, 2013). This already drastic concentration of land in favour of economic elites deepened even further during the late 20th century and into the 21st, driven principally through violent processes of dispossession (Giraldo, 2015; Fajardo, 2015).

The neoliberal opening of the economy in the early 1990s would lead to profound shifts in the nature of the struggle for land, dictated by the shifting requirements of land use by national and international capital:

During this period there were profound spatial transformations which ended up giving new content to the conflicts for land...to the historic conflict over the propriety of land was now added the question of land use, derived from the tendency of capitalist accumulation, which now demanded the extension of the economic frontier and not only the agricultural frontier. Rural territories are submitted to dynamics imposed by extractives, timber, biofuel and livestock industries, which all require infrastructure projects. The logical consequence has been the expropriation and appropriation of territories which become linked to the economic frontier, to redefine their use (Estrada, 2015:p20)

These processes can be understood as violent 'enclosures' in rural areas, as capital seeks to violently expand markets and bring new territories into the capitalist system, reconfiguring social relations in the process (De Angelis, 2007).

State terror and disarticulation of dissent

Throughout Colombia's relatively short history of independence, political and economic elites have demonstrated a willingness to employ violence in pursuit of their class interests (Estrada Alvarez, 2014; Vega Cantor, 2002a, 2002b, 2002c; Giraldo, 2015; Hylton, 2006; Motta 2014). They have established sophisticated strategies and mechanisms for dealing with the subaltern classes, *'premised upon and articulated through the disarticulation of dissent and the systematic elimination of opposition'* (Motta, 2014:p19). Over recent decades, the systematic extermination of generations of social leaders has damaged and diminished processes seeking social transformations, affecting all sectors including the trade union, indigenous, peasant, student and black movements:

In different circumstances and moments of the historical process, the tendency to repression, criminalisation or stigmatisation, and even physical destruction and the intention of extermination [of entire groups], has been evident; The imposition of various forms and devices of social regulation that have naturalised the exercise of violence, and which are intended to break all expressions of cooperation and solidarity and extend a type of "social fascism" which doesn't rule liquidation of the opponent, who is converted into an enemy. (Estrada Alvarez, 2015:p60)

The National Centre of Historic Memory reported that between 1958 and 2013, the conflict in Colombia had claimed at least 220,000 lives, 80% of whom were civilians (Centro Nacional de Memoria Historica, 2013). The real figures are likely much higher, given the difficulty in documenting cases and the reluctance of many families to report cases to the authorities. In 2018, the same institution reported that it had documented more than 83,000 cases enforced disappearance in Colombia over the course of the armed conflict (between 1953 and 2018), more than double the combined number of disappearances of the dictatorships in Brasil, Argentina and Chile (Centro Nacional de Memoria Historica, 2018).

A prominent strategy of violence used against the civilian population in recent times has been the 'false positive' mode of committing extrajudicial executions. During the far-right wing presidency of Alvaro Uribe (2002-2010), during which human rights violations against the general population surged, the Colombian armed forces and in particular the army began to systematically murder civilians and present the victims as guerrillas fallen in combat. This practice was directed from the highest echelons of the Colombian army, and was the result of a controversial, secretive government policy which created a system of rewards for soldiers based on the number of guerrillas killed, in order to demonstrate the success of the government's war policy for public consumption, but more importantly before the Colombian military's largest benefactor, the United States (Vega Cantor, 2015). Research by Rojas and

Benavides has estimated that over 10,000 Colombian citizens were murdered in 'false positive' execution cases between 2002-2010 (Rojas and Benavides, 2018).

Narcos, paramilitaries and the bleeding of Latin America's oldest democracy

The most prolific perpetrators of violence have been paramilitary militias, set up under the guidance of the United States during the height of the Cold War (Vega Cantor, 2015). Paramilitaries have been responsible for some of the worst crimes against humanity of recent history anywhere in the world, committing acts of barbarity against the civilian population on a massive scale. Paramilitary organisations began to be formed from as early as the 1960s, but it was during the 1980s that they grew exponentially and began a national campaign which saw a tsunami of crimes against humanity, often operating in concert with agents of the state, helped by the injection of drug money alongside support from national and international capital, an ultra-right wing political-military project with drastic implications for democracy and alternative projects. (Giraldo, 2004, 2015). Social movements, political activists, and any sector seen as potentially oppositional to the interests of national and international economic interests have been extensively targeted by paramilitaries for elimination, harassment and intimidation (Giraldo, 2015; Montoya, 2015; Motta, 2014; Estrada Alvarez, 2015). This strategy continues to the present, despite changes in the modus operandi of the paramilitary organisations which have decreased their public visibility and allowed the political and economic elites to distance itself from their actions (Human Rights Watch, 2010).

The decade of the 1980s saw the emergence of hugely powerful drugs cartels, and their gradual fusion with paramilitaries who were already committing atrocities against the civilian population. The paramilitaries employed a scorched earth policy which supposedly aimed to dismantle civilian support for paramilitaries in rural areas by targeting civilian for assassination and massacres, but in reality would drive one of the largest land redistribution processes in Colombia's history, from peasants to landowning elites:

Narco-paramilitarism began a huge process of land dispossession, through massacres and mass forced displacement of the population from the 1980s until the present, which has internally displaced 6 million and usurped around 8 million hectares. (Giraldo, 2015:p18)

From the 1980s onwards, this fusion of drugs barons and paramilitaries has had dramatic implications for the possibility of democratic opposition and community organising in Colombia. Conspiring with state security forces, tens of thousands of activists and politicians were assassinated (including three presidential candidates), with thousands more forced into exile (Moncayo, 2015; Giraldo, 2015). This

included the genocide of the left-wing *Union Patriótica* political party in which at least 3666 party militants, from grassroots activists to presidential candidates, were assassinated or forcibly disappeared between 1984 and 2002 (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2018) .

This period also saw an increase in corruption, as drug money undermined and weakened the country's already tainted democratic institutions (Moncayo, 2015). The multi-billion dollar cocaine trade has for decades played a key role in Colombia's political economy, with involvement of politicians, armed forces, paramilitary groups and the FARC guerrilla movement (Montoya, 2015; Estrada Alvarez, 2015).

The US-backed so-called 'war on drugs', has also had implications for the civilian population and social movement organising in Colombia. From the year 2000 onwards, despite widespread reports of human rights violations by the Colombian armed forces, and systematic collaboration by the military with paramilitary death squads (Giraldo, 2015; Hylton, 2006), US military support to Colombia was massively increased through the highly controversial 'Plan Colombia', an initiative ostensibly aimed at supporting the Colombian government in the struggle against the illegal drugs trade and thus help to bring the violent conflict in Colombia to an end. In reality, the additional Plan Colombia funding coincided with a large increase in human rights violations against the civilian population, and saw the arms provided by the US used in human rights violations such as massacres (Hylton, 2006).

In rural territories where coca crops are cultivated, the raw material for the production of cocaine at the lowest rung of the production chain, the illegal drugs trade has had devastating effect upon community and movement organising, serving to weaken and destabilise the organisational structures of communities and movements as drugs barons impose their own armed authority. This often means intimidating or even murdering any individual or collective who opposes them. The drugs business also serves to distort local economies causing the loss of traditional livelihoods and food sovereignty; destroy ecosystems; and affect cultural practices (*current leading Nomadesc member, interview, 2018*).

Javier Giraldo has described the mechanisms and strategies through which the Colombian state is able to enact and reproduce state terrorism (a term in which Giraldo includes paramilitary violence). One vital part of the process is a legal system which guarantees impunity for those responsible for committing human rights violations. Giraldo has described what he refers to as a criminal state apparatus, of which the paramilitary organisations form part, which operates in conjunction with and parallel to the formal, constitutional state and which is responsible for enacting and reproducing violence and repression against anything and anyone deemed a threat to elite interests. (Giraldo, 2004,2015).

Giraldo's analysis helps to understand why Colombia is able to retain the title of 'Latin America's oldest democracy', whilst maintaining such consistently high levels of political violence, human rights violations and armed conflict. The country's democratic system was historically dominated by the two traditional political parties, the Liberal party and the Conservative party, both of which have invariably represented the interests of the national and international bourgeoisie. During the 21st Century their dominance has been ended by the emergence of a series of new parties, the majority of which represent the same interests as the traditional parties. The democratic system has historically functioned on the basis of patronage and corruption, with hugely powerful local political clans (Hylton, 2006). During elections, vote-buying is endemic, and allegations of electoral fraud are frequent.

As the foregoing discussion has demonstrated, the democratic system in Colombia has not been a viable route for political and social transformations in favour of the country's majorities. This lack of genuine democratic participation, representation and possibility for change has been an important factor in the perpetuation of armed conflict in the country (Fajardo, 2015; Montoya, 2015).

Militarised neoliberalism

From 1991 onwards, the neoliberal restructuring of the Colombian economy brought mass privatisation of public services, deregulation of the economy, drastic reductions in levels of public expenditure, and casualisation of the labour market (Estrada Alvarez, 2010,2015; Sarmiento, 2006, Moncayo, 2015). National industry buckled as the economy was opened up to cheap imports from richer countries through bilateral trade agreements, and the economy was re-oriented to focus on the exportation of primary resources including coal, oil, gold, nickel and emeralds, to the benefit of foreign corporations and transnational aspects of Colombian capital (Vega Cantor, 2015; Moncayo, 2015; Estrada Alvarez, 2015; Higginbottom, 2005). During a period when millions of Colombians were driven from the countryside into the cities, the implications of the economic reforms for the Colombian population have been devastating: snowballing inequality; collapsing and unaffordable public services, and mass informality and unemployment (Sarmiento, 2006; Estrada Alvarez, 2015).

The mass violence of the state and its paramilitary allies has played a vital facilitating role in the neoliberal transformation of Colombian society and the counter-agrarian reforms which have taken place over recent decades, leading some observers to characterise Colombia's political economy as 'militarised neoliberalism' (Novelli, 2004; Motta, 2014).

It is important to note the systematic, strategic nature of the political violence. It has been employed in different ways, and targeted at different groups and social sectors, depending upon the different stages and requirements of the political and economic transformations and the nature and level of resistance and opposition. In urban centres, trade unions defending workers' rights and public services, community activists and students' organisations have found themselves targeted for selective assassinations, enforced disappearances, trumped up legal charges, and death threats. Communities in rural areas where guerrilla organisations were known to operate during the late 1990s and early 2000s were repeatedly targeted for massacres, torture and sexual violence by paramilitary forces, often working in collaboration with state forces. This violence, along with the impact of the militarisation of civilian life, and the trauma of the ongoing conflict, drove mass displacement from the countryside, and much of the abandoned land would end up in the hands of national and multinational capital (Centro Nacional de Memoria Historica, 2013).

Subordination and dependence: Colombia/USA relations

A central feature of Colombia's political economy is the dominant grip which the United States has had over the country throughout virtually its entire history of independence. Since the mid-19th Century, US strategic economic and military interests have played a defining role in the political, military and economic life of Colombia, and it would therefore be difficult to overstate the US's role in shaping the country's history in almost every aspect of political life. Throughout that time, domestic economic and military policy in Colombia have rarely moved in a different direction from that favoured by Washington. The relationship has between the countries been described as one of '*subordination and dependence*' (Vega Cantor, 2015, p1); as well as '*subordination by invitation*', given that it has been reproduced and maintained by a longstanding '*pact between national elites, for whom the subordination has meant economic and political gains*' (Tickner, 2007; p98).

The country is considered the US's closest ally in Latin America and has for over a century and a half been central to the US' imperialist military dominance in the region. For decades it has been one of the world's largest recipients of US military aid, and hosts seven large US military bases, taking advantage of the country's geostrategic location at the northern tip of South America spanning the Pacific and Caribbean oceans. This relationship goes far beyond financing of the Colombian military and has included training for large numbers of senior Colombian military officers (many of whom would later be implicated in human rights violations), the permanent provision of military advice and guidance, and the full adoption of US counter-insurgency and domestic security policy recommendations. From the beginning of the

1940s, into the Cold War period and to the present day, the US has arguably been the principal architect of the policies and culture of the Colombian state security forces, including the bloody modern history of internal repression and of mass human rights violations against the civilian population. Vega Cantor (2015) argues that such is the role of the US that it must be considered a direct actor in the Colombian internal armed conflict as opposed to an external influence. The US was also directly involved in the creation of the ultra-right wing paramilitary death squads which would go on to commit some of the worst crimes against humanity of the 20th and 21st centuries, terrorise the civilian population, persecuting and killing anybody deemed to be a left wing or 'communist' sympathiser. The creation of the paramilitaries was one of the recommendations of the military mission to Colombia led by the US General Yarborough in 1962 (ibid).

Throughout its modern history, Colombian domestic policy has repeatedly been bent to the will of the imperialist requirements of the US. The capitalist modernisation of Colombia which took place in the 1920s - from infrastructure building to economic institutions and industrial and economic policy- was designed by Edward Kemmerer, a private consultant with close links to the US government who spent two months in Colombia at the invite of the Colombian government in 1923 and made a series of recommendations aimed at preparing the country for a transnational capitalist transition. Kemmerer's recommendations were highly beneficial to the commercial interests of US multinationals. They were adopted by the Colombian parliament without a single alteration (Vega Cantor, 2002a). In more recent times, as mentioned above in the early 1990s Colombia adopted the neoliberal Washington Consensus policy agenda, leading to the economic opening of the economy and mass privatisations, to the benefit of North American and European capital. Colombia in 2010 signed a far-reaching Free Trade Agreement with the US, granting further privileges to US multinational companies through legislation and further opening up the national economy. The government has signed 17 bilateral Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) including with the European Union, Canada, Israel, and Japan.

Multinational companies in Colombia

In foreign policy the term 'strategic economic interests' is often code for the interests of a country's multinational companies. US multinational companies are a vital part of the country's imperialist machinery. US foreign policy in Colombia has since the beginning of the 20th century been aimed at maximising economic benefits of the US multinationals which operate in the country (Vega Cantor, 2015). During the first decades of the 20th Century the oil companies such as Tropical Oil Company and industrial agricultural companies such as the United Fruit Company set up enclaves which employed tens of

thousands of workers, in areas in which the companies exercised political, economic and military control (ibid). Ever since the corporations arrived in the country, Colombian political elites have consistently demonstrated their willingness to defend the interests of multinational companies over and above the interests and including the lives and wellbeing of the Colombian population. Perhaps the most stark example was the '*masacre de los bananeros*' in December 1928, made famous by Colombia's Nobel prize-winning writer Gabriel Garcia Marquez, in which Colombian troops fired upon striking workers of the United Fruit Company plantation. The striking workers' demands were mainly in line with Colombian legal standards of employment, along with some additional petitions relating to basic hygiene, health and remuneration (Umaña Hernandez, 2014). As narrated by Garcia Marquez in his novel, the exact number of those killed was never established, however according to a cable to Washington from the US ambassador of the time it was over one thousand (Vega Cantor, 2015; Garcia Marquez, 1967). Another example of the influence of multinational companies over US foreign policy in Colombia was the intensive lobbying of oil companies, in particular Occidental Petroleum Corporation, for the creation of Plan Colombia and also over its eventual content and focus (Richani, 2005).

Whilst US multinationals may have had a head start on rivals from other countries, they have by no means been alone in playing an active role in fomenting violence and perpetuating conflict in Colombia. Some of the world's largest and best known multinational companies have been accused of collaborating with paramilitary death squads in Colombia in order to break trade unions and extinguish local community resistance. Indeed, during the worst years of paramilitary violence at the end of the 1990s and into the early 2000s, foreign investment in the country ballooned as foreign capital took advantage of the economic opportunities offered by the generous royalties offered by the Colombian government and the favourable conditions created by the activities of paramilitary death squads exercising violence and repression on their behalf. Richani (2005) contends that multinational companies, in particular in the extractives sector, have been responsible for perpetuating the conflict in Colombia through their role as one of the main financiers of illegal armed groups, but also by creating and exacerbating conflicts over land and natural resources with their presence, usually at the expense of local populations and local economies.

Non-peaceful peace

On 24 November 2016, after more than five years of negotiations, a peace agreement was signed between the Colombian government led by Juan Manuel Santos, and the country's largest guerrilla group, the FARC. The Santos government also engaged in several years of negotiations with the country's second

largest guerrilla organisation, the Ejercito de Liberacion Nacional (ELN). However both processes were thrown into uncertainty by the election in June 2018 of the hardline right wing politician Ivan Duque, dealing a blow to the already fragile Colombian peace process.

Despite the inevitable optimism which accompanies the end of such a protracted conflict, the conduct of the negotiation process with the FARC was broadly criticised by social movements and other civil society organisations for lacking genuine and meaningful civil society participation, and for the content of the agreement itself. From the very beginning of negotiations, the Santos government refused to entertain the possibility of reform on issues which many identify as being structural causes of the conflict including the economic development model; the country's security and intelligence apparatus; and the country's electoral system (Giraldo, 2016; Ospina, 2016). In 2016, Javier Giraldo warned that developments suggested a peace which:

benefits businessmen and transnational investors, who will be able to intensify their extraction of natural resources, but in which the government represses with cruel violence the social protests of communities affected by the social and ecological destruction which the multinational companies have caused (Giraldo, 2016: n.p.).

Events since 2016 have borne out this warning. The peace agreement brought an economic dividend to industries such as tourism and extractives sectors, however the incidence of murders of activists in Colombia rose alarmingly following the signing of the peace agreement, with the primary culprits being paramilitary organisations which continue to operate with almost universal impunity. According to the NGO Instituto para Estudios de Desarrollo y la Paz, 310 activists were assassinated in 2020 (Indepaz, 2021). Meanwhile in June 2020 the Comunes political party, which was formed by the demobilised FARC guerrilla, reported that 200 former FARC rebels had been murdered since the signing of the peace agreement (El Espectador, 2018).

In areas once controlled by the FARC, particularly those considered to be strategically useful for transporting drugs and arms, new armed organisations including paramilitaries and dissident guerrilla groups, moved in to violently contest territories, committing regular atrocities against the civilian population and bringing a return of perpetration of massacres against rural communities. (Verdad Abierta website, 2018)

Unfulfilled promises and systemic opposition

Whilst the level of governmental opposition and non-compliance undoubtedly increased under the Duque government from 2018 onwards, internal resistance to the Colombian peace process from powerful

elements of the political and economic establishment has been consistent. These have exercised their opposition in varying forms in order to obstruct the implementation of policies related to the agreement. At the same time, political elites ensured that promised increases in state spending in conflict-affected areas barely materialised (Estrada Alvarez, 2019; Giraldo, 2015 Mendez Blanco, 2019). Estrada Alvarez argues:

we are dealing with forms of seeking to continue the conflict, expressed now within the implementation [of the peace agreement], in which emerge particularly powerful systemic resistances which have historically opposed reform in Colombia, expressed in a variety of ways, including extreme political violence committed by their armed wings-paramilitaries...(Estrada Alvarez, 2019:p15)

Ivan Duque was the presidential candidate of Centro Democratico, the party led by far-right wing former president Alvaro Uribe. Still one of the country's most influential politicians, Uribe has been the peace process's most strident opponent and Colombia's most controversial figure in recent history. His time in office (2002-2010) was notable for high levels of human rights violations and corruption, a massive increase in militarisation of society; and persistent allegations of links to paramilitaries and drugs traffickers.

According to Estrada Alvarez, President Duque has sought on the one hand to devalue and de-legitimise the peace agreement in order to portray it as *'an event without significant historical meaning or impact'*; and on the other hand, allowing the persistence of political violence in order to demonstrate the futility of the peace agreement, in order to justify a return to the hardline authoritarian policies of the Uribe era rather than peace-building policies (Estrada Alvarez, 2019:p17).

Throughout the 2018 election campaign, Duque and Uribe made clear their intention to alter aspects of the peace accords. Soon after taking office, Duque announced that his government's finances could not cover the commitments acquired with the FARC for the post conflict period (El Espectador, 2018), whilst at the same time announcing a large increase in the military budget and cutting most other government departmental spending. President Duque also froze the peace talks with the ELN guerrilla.

Given the centrality of the issue of land tenancy to the prolongation of the Colombian conflict, an important example of the lack of political will to implement the peace process on the part of Colombian governmental institutions is the issue of land restitution, which fell under the first point of the peace negotiations: 'Comprehensive Rural Reform'. Yenly Mendez Blanco argues that the structural forces which have historically opposed rural reform and deepen the concentration of land ownership have not been halted at any point throughout the peace process, creating the challenge of carrying out *'land reform in*

the context of counter-reform' (Mendez Blanco, 2019). In this way, the process of land restitution has been impeded by the same logic of land concentration which has been identified as a structural cause and driver of the Colombian conflict. According to a 2020 report by a group of NGOs, only 350,000 hectares of land had been successfully marked for restitution, against the figure of 6 million which had been initially set for redressing the issue. More than 63% of victims' applications were turned down by the land restitution unit (Comision Colombiana de Juristas, 2020:p6).

2.2 Social movements and popular dissent in Colombia

The Colombian state has developed ever more sophisticated ways (both violent and non-violent) of dealing with popular classes in order to disarticulate dissent and see off challenges to elite dominance. Yet it has been the incessant agitating and thirst for change of those popular classes which has formed the other side of a dialectic and has at various times challenged and undermined the racial and class domination and privilege of creole elites. Hence, whilst repression of popular movements and political violence have been constant themes throughout Colombian history, so too have popular resistance and social mobilisation (Vega Cantor 2002a, 2002b, 2002c; Molano, 2015; Hylton, 2006). At different points during the country's history, different subjects have come to the vanguard of urban and rural struggles for social change: including trade unions, students, peasant, black and indigenous movements.

As mentioned above, the rural struggles of indigenous, black and peasant communities have been particularly significant in Colombia. These rural subjects can be defined as socio-territorial movements, for whom the struggle for territory, and the fact of continuing to live their traditional subsistence agricultural lifestyles in their territories, is a central part of their social struggles and of their cultural and political identities (Halvorsen et al, 2019). Their territories are notable for a high level of autonomy, little presence and influence of the administrative organs of the state, and their own forms of organisation and coexistence, based upon reciprocity and solidarity.

In the case of indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities, many of their territories are officially recognised as collective ethnic territories, where land ownership is held as a collective title, and an extent of autonomous territorial control is exercised over their territory through their own forms of political organisation. For indigenous people this includes the administering of alternative, customary justice. Hence, indigenous and black rural communities in their territories have achieved degrees of autonomy over the decisions which affect them in the control and administration of their territories. In rural territories, many communities still practice small-scale agriculture, which also provides a level of

autonomy and sovereignty for social movements engaged in building counter-hegemonic alternative organisational projects by allowing them not to depend entirely upon the capitalist market.

Ever since the Spanish conquest, the country's subaltern classes have developed strategies to defend and expand their traditional cultures and forms of organising their communities and rural territories. Subaltern resistance has multiple and varied expressions, and besides the organised political struggles of the country's social movements, it can be observed deeply ingrained within the country's multiple ethnicities and cultures (Fals Borda, 2008). The ethnic indigenous and Afro-descended populations as elsewhere in the Americas were systematically subjugated and submitted to slavery and genocidal violence, meaning that today's black and indigenous movements articulate their struggles as part of a continuum which stretches back to the Spanish invasion. Nonetheless, it was in the second half of the 20th century that the militant, powerful indigenous and black social movements of today emerged onto the scene to lead important struggles in Colombia.

From the mid-2000s onwards, Colombia has seen some significant attempts to bring together diverse sectors of the social movement in national 'movements of movements', breaching the urban/rural divide, and in which it has been rural indigenous and peasant movements which have arguably been the driving forces. Cruz Rodriguez identifies the Minga of Social and Communitarian Resistance as a key moment for social movements in the country. Initially, *'between sixty and eighty thousand indigenous and peasant protestors mobilised to block the Panamerican highway [in Cauca department, southwest Colombia] and were brutally repressed by police anti-disturbance forces'* (Cruz Rodriguez, 2016: p52). President Uribe refused to meet them to discuss their demands *'the fulfilment of previous commitments made by the government; and rejection of the government's free trade agreements and...[hardline]security policies'* (*ibid*). Upon the President's refusal to meet, the movement, led by the Cauca Regional Indigenous Council, decided to march from town to town all the way from Cauca to the capital city of Bogota, holding public meetings in town squares along the way in order to engage with local communities, explain their protest, hear the experiences of the local community, and make common cause. According to Cruz Rodriguez, the Minga generated a process of renewal of political discourses for social movements in Colombia, and would prove to be a spark for the birth of subsequent 'movements of movements' including the People's Congress and the Patriotic March (Cruz Rodriguez, 2016):

The *Congreso de los Pueblos* is a national social movement platform which was created in 2010 in response to:

A call to the country's social and political movements and organisations which didn't participate in the Minga to join together with them in order to construct a common project and vision for the country through exercises of popular legislation. Popular legislation is a repertoire of action which consists in pronouncing the demands, diagnostics and proposals of the movement in the form of legislation [as 'people's mandates'], the objective of which is to empower those who form part of the movement to participate in the construction and fulfilment of these mandates; it also seeks to denounce and oppose institutional legislation...the Congreso de los Pueblos' slogan is the construction of a country for dignified life (Ortiz Maya, 2016: p8)

Nomadesc has actively participated in both the Minga and subsequently in the People's Congress movement, and has committed substantial organisational energy and resources to them in the process.

The southwest region of Colombia in which Nomadesc operates, and in particular the departments of Cauca and Valle del Cauca, has played a disproportionately large role in Colombia's history of radical popular politics, partly because of the region's ethnic and cultural diversity, with the largest numbers of indigenous and Afro-Colombian peoples in the country. Having been one of the country's main industrial regions, Valle del Cauca has also been the site of important trade union struggles through the 20th and into early 21st century (Bermudez Prado et al, 2020; Vega Cantor, 2002a). In recent years, the region has continued to produce some of the country's most prominent social movement uprisings and mobilisations.

Indigenous, peasant, black and trade union struggles

For over 100 years following the arrival of the European invaders, indigenous communities fought an all-out war against the Spanish forces. An unprecedented alliance of different indigenous ethnic groups came together to form huge indigenous armies, even uniting tribes which had previously been sworn enemies. At one point in 1583, over 20,000 indigenous people from multiple ethnicities formed part of an army which would achieve important military victories, until they were eventually defeated in 1632 (Bonilla, 2015). The indigenous struggle was 'neither blind nor spontaneous...but corresponded to a clear anti-colonial indigenous politics' (ibid; p18). Despite their military defeat, the indigenous peoples immediately reverted to pacific resistance to defend their right to govern themselves and the territories which they inhabited (ibid, p20). The Nasa indigenous ethnicity, one of Colombia's most numerous and militant indigenous groups who have led important struggles in recent decades, emerged from this period of the great indigenous war against the Spanish and its aftermath, a fusion of indigenous tribes from different regions who had fought together against the Spanish, or who had been displaced from other regions (ibid, p20). From 1914 through to the 1940s, as mentioned above the indigenous struggle was once again

ignited, and once again the epicentre of the struggle was the southwest. Indigenous leader Quintin Lame led significant uprisings in Cauca and Tolima in the struggle to defend and expand indigenous reserves, and against the exploitative rural labour relations (Vega Cantor, 2002b). Cauca department was an important centre of indigenous and black struggles for land and political participation from the early days of the modern Colombia's independence from Spain in the 19th century, and the region was at the forefront of democratic developments which created a vibrant democratic culture in the country for a brief period during the 19th century (Hylton, 2006). The Cauca department has one of the highest concentrations of indigenous peoples anywhere in the country, and is widely seen as the cradle of the indigenous struggle.

The founding of the Cauca Regional Indigenous Council (CRIC) in 1971 was part of a renewed militancy on the part of indigenous peoples in their struggle to defend and expand their territories, and would lead to the foundation of the national indigenous movement, the ONIC (Bonilla, 2015). 'Territory, autonomy and culture' has been the CRIC's slogan since its foundation, and captures the central axes of the indigenous struggle in Colombia. Today, the indigenous movement remains one of the country's most militant, and continues to struggle to protect indigenous autonomy as territories continue to be affected by the presence of the multiple armed actors involved in the armed conflict and the illicit drugs industry.

The Pacific region of the southwest, meanwhile, has the highest concentration of Afro-Colombians of any region in Colombia, and is the heartland of the black struggle in Colombia. Many Afro-descendent peoples, forcibly brought from Africa as enslaved peoples and forced to work on haciendas, plantations and mines, made the region their home as they won their freedom, some as maroons who escaped and set up 'palenques' or independent settlements and others who gradually won their freedom following the 1851 manumission law (Escobar, 2008, p28). This history of struggle and resistance continues into modern times. It was during the late 1980s and into the 1990s that a powerful, organised national black movement emerged in order to articulate these demands based on the uniqueness of the history, culture and experiences of oppression and resistance of Colombia's black community (Grueso et al, 1997). The struggle for the recognition in the 1991 constitution of Afro-Colombian communities' unique ethnic and cultural identity, and hence their collective rights to autonomy and self-government, was driven by rural riverine communities of the Pacific region, led in particular by the emergence of the national black movement the Proceso de Comunidades Negras (PCN) (ibid). PCN frames the black struggle in terms of the demand for freedom and autonomy.

In the face of the historical aggressions and abuses suffered by Afro-Colombians over centuries, their survival as a people and a culture is a sign of the centrality of resistance within their cultures and knowledge practices. An activist who has been a historic leader in the struggle of black communities in Colombia, describes how black communities in the Colombian Pacific carry with them the historic memory of the injustice of slavery, and a sense within their culture and knowledge practices of having been brought from the continent of Africa:

...there are people who say that the black struggle was invented in 1990 [with the struggle for recognition of black communities] but I believe our people already had their consciousness... I remember so much that my grandmother whenever we had an argument she'd say 'you are white!' and with that she closed the discussion... they were clear on things and what had happened, that is my story but we've picked it up all over the place ... maybe they didn't express it in the same way that we can express it today, it was expressed another way and what we did was understand that that was there... in that sense my generation ... those of us that had the opportunity to go to the university and study, all we are is translators, that was in the language of the people somehow we got some things out of here we translated them into the other language, and other things we translated and took them to the communities...but this consciousness was already there, for example I remember so much a word which they use in the Pacific, the word 'renaciente' for me that what I'm going to tell you is like the holy grail, a conversation we had in Yurumangui [remote Pacific region jungle river community]and we started talking about what the word 'renaciente' meant and the elders told me 'it is as if we were before on one side and now we are here, as if we had an accident and now we are reborn in another place' and I asked the old men, 'and where were we before?' And they said, 'in Africa', and 'what was the accident?'... Blacks have always known what happened... That day, talking to those elders, I came to understand that when they speak of renaciente it has two senses, that we are not from here and that we are here because there was slavery ... it was already there in the memory of the elders, it was there hidden behind the word, of course it is the same as we know now, but they already knew it and what we did is translate it in another way ... we weren't the first to say that we must defend our territories as black communities, our people have been saying that for a long time. (Historic leader of black movement at regional and national level, historical ally of Nomadesc and pedagogical process, interview, 2018)

In May 2017, the predominantly black population of the city of Buenaventura, on the Pacific Coast, engaged in a historic 22-day civic strike over the dreadful living conditions and lack of basic public services in the city. The strike paralysed not only the entire city, but also the country's most important port, shutting down businesses, public transport, schools, public services and closing off transport routes around and into the city (Kane and Celeita, 2018). The strike represented a key moment for the black struggle in Colombia, a galvanising event which brought national and international attention to the harsh reality of Buenaventura's black population, and the structural racism which perpetuated it.

As mentioned above, Colombia has also seen significant workers' struggles at various stages of the 20th and early 21st century. Unsurprisingly, these have coincided with periods of capitalist transition and re-organisation, during the 1920s, and from the 1970s through to the early 2000s (Cantor, 2002; Estrada Alvarez 2015; Bermudez Prado et al, 2020). From the 1970s into the 2000s, Valle del Cauca, one of the country's most important industrial regions, was the scene of historic labour struggles, with a particularly powerful trade union movement in the city of Cali (Vega Cantor, 2002a; Bermudez Prado et al, 2020; Novelli, 2004, 2007, 2010). As the country went through a process of capitalist transformation and neoliberal opening, the de-industrialisation process was fiercely contested by workers in the region. Novelli's research into the social movement unionism and anti-privatisation campaign of a public services trade union provides a demonstration of the creative, militant resistance of popular sectors in Colombia as a response to the violent imposition of militarised neoliberalism (2004, 2004a).

The 21st century has also seen significant peasant protests, particularly around the issue of land and also relating to the drastic negative impacts of free trade agreement upon the rural economy. The most significant of these was the national agrarian strike, during which tens of thousands of peasants blocked roads throughout the country for almost a month.

Conclusion

This chapter has laid out the broader social and political context in which the pedagogical process emerged, and which ultimately the pedagogical process studied in this thesis exists in order to transform. I have emphasised the economic logic which has underpinned the violence of political elites in Colombia, and the role of colonialism and imperialism throughout the country's history and up to the present. I have highlighted some of the principal structural factors which have historically served as generators and drivers of violence. I have also emphasised the vibrant history of resistance of the subaltern classes ever since the genocidal invasion by European conquistadors in 1492. This chapter provides the reader with a base understanding of the context in which the Nomadesc pedagogical process is embedded. There exists a dialectical relationship between this context, and the pedagogical process which emerges as a deliberate political response to the context and at the same time an attempt to transform it. The following chapter lays out the theoretical and methodological approach which was developed to carry out this research.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework and Methodology chapter

In the first section of this two-part chapter I outline the theoretical framework which underpins this thesis. In second section of the chapter I set out the research methodology and methods employed. As I stated in the introductory chapter, my research is guided by a political and ethical commitment to support the work and struggles of Nomadesc and the social movements it works with. This is born out of my own activism and personal involvement in these struggles. In line with the call of Bevington and Dixon (2005), I believe that it is important that critical social scientists, particularly those working on social movements, seek to engage with struggles for social change by producing research and knowledge which is useful for the movements they study. Hence, my research required a politically and ethically committed theoretical framework and methodological approach which would allow for a critical engagement with the pedagogical process in order to produce knowledge which is relevant and useful to Nomadesc, as well as to activists elsewhere. Above all, I needed a methodology which was capable of enabling me to grasp the knowledge and learning processes which occur within the struggles of social movements resisting neoliberal capitalism and constructing alternatives in southwest Colombia.

From the beginning of the process, there was a strong sense of the research as a collective endeavour. Nomadesc activists were conscious of the important story to tell relating to the accumulated experiences and learning of two decades of their pedagogical process. Hence, it was clear that a methodological approach was needed which could provide for a participative process which in some way would be accountable to Nomadesc, without losing researcher autonomy and criticality.

This chapter begins by laying out a decolonial, axiologically sensitive theoretical approach which is guided by the Epistemologies of the South framework of Boaventura de Sousa Santos, and combines a critical realist ontology with the political economy work of Massimo De Angelis in order to lay out an ontological understanding of social movement struggles for social change. In line with this framework, the second section of the chapter goes on to set out a methodological approach based on the principles of solidarity, dialogue and reciprocity. Section two begins with a discussion of the two methodological approaches which this doctoral research process employed: the participatory popular education research strategy 'systematisation of experiences; and a politically engaged activist ethnographical methodology. It goes on to present a discussion of my methodological research journey in the complex context of southwest Colombia, before finishing with a broader discussion of the complexities, challenges and merits of my methodological approach.

3.1 Theoretical Framework

Epistemologies of the South

The principal influence upon my theoretical framework is Boaventura de Sousa Santos' *'Epistemologies of the South'* framework (Santos, 2015). Santos provides an epistemological framework which is congruent with my own ethical and political persuasion, and which understands knowledge itself as a key terrain of struggle and power. Santos' work provides a theoretical grounding and axiological orientation for my entire doctoral research project.

Since its inception, the advance of modernity as an epistemological framework has underpinned the structures of domination which have sustained Western power over 'other' peoples and lands, and justified historic injustices such as colonialism, slavery and military intervention (Escobar, 2008, 2018; Mignolo, 2012; Santos, 2008). Santos argues that European universities have played a key role in disseminating a Eurocentric conception of the world that has been powerful enough to impose itself across the planet (in both intellectual and military terms) and claim universal validity, a form of epistemological monoculturalism, which by definition relies upon the subjugation of alternative forms of knowing (Santos, 2012:p11). Hence, the pursuit of knowledge through research is never a neutral endeavour which sits somehow outside of the social world and social reality. According to indigenous scholar activist Linda Teweï Smith, the history of academic research is *'inextricably linked to European imperialism, and colonialism'*, and hence research should itself be understood as *'a significant site of struggle between the interests and ways of knowing of the West and the interests and ways of resisting of the Other'* (Tuhiwai Smith, 2013:p2).

Central to Santos' conceptualisation of knowledge is the argument that there does not exist a single truth which is discoverable to human beings, and therefore that the human understanding of the world exceeds the Western understanding of the world (Santos, 1999). Santos posits two conceptualisations of knowledge: knowledge-as-regulation, and knowledge-as-emancipation. Knowledge-as-regulation, the Eurocentric conception which has been the dominant under capitalist modernity, is characterised by Santos as *'abyssal thinking'*, due to its inability to co-exist with other forms of knowledge, which are *'produced as non-existent'* (Santos, 2007: p45). This 'totalising' tendency means that Eurocentric thought (including critical theory) has tended to conceive of society as a singular totality, a notion which Santos claims *'is a social construction like any other'* (Santos, 1999:p33).

Knowledge-as-emancipation, on the other hand, regards the knowledge process as moving from the ignorance of conceiving of the other as an object, as was the case in colonialism, to seeing them as a knowing subject. By this understanding, knowledge becomes a question of solidarity with our fellow humans. For Santos, this acknowledgement is not only a political act of solidarity, it is also a crucial process in opening up those knowledges which have historically been subjugated, excluded and marginalised under the dominance of knowledge-as-regulation. Herein we begin to grasp an inherently ethical dimension of knowledge: for Santos, knowledge is an inherently axiological issue (Santos, 1999). He proposes that, *'the struggle for global social justice must, therefore, be a struggle for global cognitive justice as well. In order to succeed, this struggle requires a new kind of thinking, a post-abyssal thinking'* (Santos, 2007:p5). The first principle of this 'post-abyssal thinking' is that of 'radical co-presence', which means not simply the recognition of the existence of other knowledges, practices and agents, but recognising them as *equals* (ibid).

Santos proposes the development of *'a sociology of absences which can access and understand those epistemologies which have been rendered silent and invisible'* (Santos, 1999:p39). In excavating this, he posits an 'ecology of knowledges', in which

alternatives of knowledge and of action must be searched for, either where they have been most obviously suppressed or have survived in marginalised/discredited form. In either case, they have to be searched for in the South... the South being my metaphor for human suffering under capitalism (ibid, 1999:p38).

For Santos, the recognition of the existence of equally valid Others, with different epistemological frameworks, necessarily means that critical scholars must dispense with the idea of producing a universally applicable 'general theory'. This is not to say that scholars should renounce normativity and the aspiration of a better society, but rather to recognise that there may exist multiple notions of what that society might be, and how it can be achieved. Santos therefore calls for a normativity which is *'constructed from the bottom up and in a participatory and multicultural fashion'* (ibid: p42).

The recognition and emphasis of difference which Santos calls for within the social sciences is also where he believes the most abundant source of transformative potential lies for the social sciences: for him, difference should be conceived of as a source of strength, knowledge and solidarity. He proposes that an ethical social science which seeks to redress this historical oppression must seek to *facilitate* an intercultural dialogue *between* diverse knowledges and struggles, and he thus calls for the development of a *'theory of translation'* (Santos, 1999). This reconceptualisation and implied de-centring of the role of the social scientist within academic research is central to the design of my methodology for this doctoral

research project, and I believe holds huge promise for critical, decolonial social sciences. The work of translation which Santos advocates must aim:

to create intelligibility, coherence, and articulation in a world that sees itself enriched by multiplicity and diversity. Translation is not a mere technique. Even its obvious technical components and the way in which they are applied in the course of the translation process must be the object of democratic deliberation. Translation is a dialogical and political work. It has an emotional dimension (Santos, 2005: p20).

Importantly, it is defined by the idea that all cultures are incomplete - a hypothesis which Santos terms 'negative universalism' - and can be enriched through dialogue and interaction with other cultures. Hence translation - of both knowledges and actions- is a key part of any intercultural dialogue and allows the potential of such encounter to be realised (Santos, 2005:p17).

Santos brings an axiological dimension to my theoretical framework, whereby research becomes a question of emancipation and solidarity, rather than simply the production of knowledge for the (Western) academy. This creates the basis for a decolonial epistemological framework rooted in principles of epistemological pluralism, dialogue and reciprocity. It also brings into focus the inextricable relationship between knowledge and power, in the functioning of the dominant epistemological frameworks of capitalist modernity and its subjugation and rendering invisible alternative epistemologies; but also in the way that peoples and movements can build counter-power through intercultural collaboration and alternative knowledge production. Nomadesc's work, with a range of social movements and sectors including indigenous, Afro-Colombians, peasants, trade unions and students, is based upon the notion of a '*dialogue of knowledges*' bringing together diverse subjects of struggle with their unique epistemologies, histories and politics, and hence De Sousa Santos' call for a '*theory of translation*' is of utmost relevance to my research. This framework also allows us to bring into theoretical focus the more subjective dimensions of social reality which have historically been undervalued within critical theory, such as culture and emotions. This includes overcoming the separation in western political thought of thinking and action in order to understand embodied processes of learning and resistance.

Critical realism: complex, multi-layered reality

Santos provides a persuasive, ethical epistemological framework which will ground and inform my research. Yet, having acknowledged the existence of multiple ways of understanding social reality and indeed the complex and varied nature of social reality, it is important to expand my theoretical framework in order to build an ontological scaffolding for my research into social movement learning and knowledge

production in southwest Colombia. I do this below by drawing initially upon the meta-theory of critical realism, and subsequently upon the work of Massimo De Angelis.

Roy Bhaskar was part of a generation of British social scientists who were deeply impacted by their experience of organising and protesting during 1968. He sought to develop a meta-theoretical philosophical framework which would be relevant and useful to activists and academics engaged in struggles for social change by providing the philosophical basis for a critical social science firmly rooted in the real world, with the aim not just of understanding social reality, but of transforming it. He described the role of the framework he developed, critical realism, as 'under-labouring' for the social sciences in order that they may illuminate the project of human emancipation (Bhaskar, 2011).

For critical realists, reality is not immediately perceptible due to its complex, multi-layered nature. This means that in order to understand reality, we must go beyond empiricism and use theory and abstraction – however these must be based on practice (Bhaskar, 1989). Critical realists identify three broad dimensions of reality: the 'empirical'; the 'actual' and the 'real' (Bhaskar, 2008, 2011; Collier, 1994). The empirical level is that of observable reality; the actual is the level of events and processes which occur and drive empirical reality; and the real refers to the deeper generative mechanisms and causal structures which lie beneath the other layers (Jessop, 2005). Critical realists emphasise the relational nature of these layers: the internally necessary and/or externally contingent relations that obtain within and among these dimensions (ibid: p42).

In order to illustrate the schema I draw upon an example from the Colombian context: at the empirical level, an observable reality in recent years was violent action by riot police to confiscate and destroy the rice crops of peasant farmers. The actual process which underlies this reality was the passing of a law in the Colombian parliament which prohibited the cultivation of crops from seeds which were not licensed by the Colombian government. Yet to understand this process, we must look beneath to real mechanisms such as political economy processes of neoliberal globalisation and the historic role of US imperialism in Colombia (the seeds law was enacted as part of Colombia's obligations under its FTA with the US). Bhaskar argued that in order to understand and transform reality, it is important to identify the structures which produce events and discourses (Bhaskar, 1989). These structures may be linked to systemic forces such as capitalism, imperialism, patriarchy or the historical legacies of colonialism.

Critical realism is based upon an ontological dualism which can account for both structure and agency- it has space for both society and the individual (Collier, 1994). Hence, for critical realists, structure depends

upon the agency of individuals, and individuals depend upon structures. Social agents are embedded in, reproduce and transform, *'structures of power which may involve alienation, domination and oppression'* (Bhaskar, 2011, p. 6). Bhaskar understood society as *'the ensemble of positioned practices and networked interrelationships which individuals never create but in their practical activity always presuppose, and in doing so everywhere reproduce or transform'* (ibid, p5).

Critical realists emphasise the relational nature of reality, and hence seek to identify relationships of influence between the different levels of reality, processes, structures and human agency. Rather than seeking to identify simplistic causal relationships, critical realists understand social reality as a complex open system in which countless, varied (and often contradictory) social forces or 'generative mechanisms' interact with and influence each other (Bhaskar, 2008; Sayer, 2004). Crucially, for critical realists both material and discursive elements of the social world have generative powers; as do both social structure and human agency. Critical realists insist upon the capacity of humans to transform social reality.

Bhaskar was critical of what he termed 'the epistemic fallacy' which he felt predominates at the meta-theoretical level within the social sciences, whereby *'statements about being can be reduced to or analysed in terms of statements about knowledge'* (Bhaskar, 1979). Critical realists argue that reality does exist independently of human knowledge of it. The epistemic fallacy, according to Bhaskar, has caused social science theory to become detached from the real world. Critical realists argue that because reality is not fully knowable, all knowledge claims and accounts are 'partial, transient, and socially embedded' (Sayers, 2010 n.p), and hence open to critique, including theoretical knowledge claims: *'Truth is neither absolute nor purely conventional and relative, but a matter of practical adequacy'* (Bhaskar, 2008, p.115).

For critical realists then, the social scientist's place within the social world puts them in a subject-subject relationship but does not preclude them from arriving at critical explanations of phenomena in the social world, and in actual fact it is vital for the production of knowledge, since knowledge and practice are interdependent, and knowledge is embedded in social practices (Sayers, 2010). Knowledge must always be understood as a transient phenomenon within the social context in which it is produced and reproduced through social activity, as opposed to *'a product or a thing which exists outside of us'*. (Sayers, 2010:p99). As Outhwaite noted, critical realists are *'ontologically bold but epistemologically cautious'* (Outhwaite 1987:p.34) and while recognising that there is a reality out there, our means of getting to grips with that reality is always partial and limited, thus requiring a level of humility on behalf of the researcher and the research. A humility that befits the previous commitments laid out by Boaventura De Sousa Santos for an Epistemology of the South.

Towards an emancipatory decolonial framework

It is important here to engage in a brief discussion of ‘decolonisation’, in order to lay out how this ambiguous, overused phrase has been understood within various strands of literature; how it is understood within this thesis, and in order to make the case for a decolonial approach underpinned by a critical realist ontological conceptualisation.

The concept of decolonialisation, and with it decoloniality, have been used and understood in varying ways. Ochieng Okoth has argued that *‘confusion about the term is constitutive of contemporary conversations’* (Ochieng Okoth, 2021:N.P.). That is to say, the concept of decolonisation, and in particular how it should be done and what its objective(s) should be, are contested.

Decolonial traditions include a range of theoretical lineages, including Third World Marxism, Pan Africanism, Black Marxism, Anti-imperialism, Black Nationalism, World Systems theory, Dependency Theory and Decolonial Feminism. During the 20th century figures such as Walter Rodney, Amilcar Cabral, Samir Amin, Franz Fanon, and Steve Biko, through their revolutionary theory and praxis, critiqued colonialism and its legacies; neo-colonialism; and racism.

More recently, within academia the term decolonial has come to be most closely associated with the work of the Latin American modernity/coloniality research program, and the work of a group of Latin American scholars primarily based in the US, in particular Anibal Quijano, Maria Lugones, and Walter Mignolo (Grosfoguel, 2011). This group’s thinking converged around their conceptualisation of ‘modernity/coloniality’ as two sides of the same coin. Arturo Escobar has summarised this conceptualisation as entailing:

- (1) an emphasis on locating the origins of modernity with the Conquest of America and the control of the Atlantic after 1492, rather than in the most commonly accepted landmarks such as the Enlightenment or the end of the eighteenth century; (2) a persistent attention to colonialism and the making of the capitalist world system as constitutive of modernity; this includes a determination not to overlook the economy and its concomitant forms of exploitation; (3) consequently, the adoption of a world perspective in the explanation of modernity, in lieu of a view of modernity as an intra-European phenomenon; (4) the identification of the domination of others outside the European core as a necessary dimension of modernity, with the concomitant subalternisation of the knowledge and cultures of these other groups; (5) a conception of eurocentrism as the knowledge form of modernity/coloniality, a hegemonic representation and mode of knowing that claims universality for itself, and that relies

on a confusion between abstract universality and the concrete world hegemony derived from Europe's position as center (Escobar, 2007:p184)

The epistemological domination associated with modernity/coloniality includes the non-recognition of 'other' forms and dimensions of knowledge such as emotional and embodied knowledge (Motta, 2014).Bhambra argues that through their conceptualisation of modernity/coloniality, Quijano and Mignolo provide us

with a way to discuss the more profound realities of colonialism, especially 'after' the event. The colonial matrix of power, that Mignolo argues is the inextricable combination of the rhetoric of modernity (progress, development, growth) and the logic of coloniality (poverty, misery, inequality), has to be central to any discussion of contemporary global inequalities and the historical basis of their emergence. (Bhambra, 2014: p119; Mignolo, 2002; Quijano, 2007).

Such an analysis of the epistemological domination which underpins both modernity finds broad convergence within literature which lays claim to the decolonial label. A more vexed question is that of the implications of such an analysis for methodology and praxis, both inside and outside of the academy. The question of how to overcome the ongoing pernicious impacts of colonialism, whether understood as coloniality or indeed neo-colonialism, brings widely varying responses. One aspect which draws broad agreement in relation to research approaches is the need to centre, genuinely listen to and learn from, those marginalised subjects whose lives are transversed with the ongoing legacies of colonialism (Lugones, cited in Bhambra, 2014). Hence, a fundamental task of any decolonial academic undertaking must be, *'To render visible...the non-subjects of contemporary capitalism as knowing subjects'* (Motta, 2014: p3).

For the scholars of the modernity/coloniality research programme, an important aspect of 'decolonisation' implied *'thinking otherwise'* in order to *'move beyond the categories created and imposed by Western epistemology'* (Escobar, 2007: p187). Since modernity cannot be disentangled from coloniality, for Mignolo and others decolonisation necessarily means a clean rupture from the entire epistemological apparatus of modernity. Hence for Mignolo this means that the modernity/coloniality conceptualisation should be understood as an alternative 'paradigm' of its own, a replacement for the Eurocentric paradigms which have dominated under the schema of modernity (Mignolo, 2002: Escobar, 2007).

The notion of modernity/coloniality as a paradigm in its own right is problematic. One common critique relates to the tendency of its proponents to lack a mode of analysis of the material dimension of reality. Instead, the prioritisation of alternative modes of knowing leads its proponents to a focus upon the discursive dimension of reality, as demonstrated by the ontological prioritisation of knowledge as the primary determinant realm of reality. This is a manifestation of what critical realists call ‘the epistemic fallacy’, one of the central flaws which according to Roy Bhaskar (1979) have hindered social sciences under modernity. The ‘epistemic fallacy’ can be understood as the reduction of ontology to epistemology, and is reflected in different ways within the positivist and hermeneutic approaches (including postmodernism and poststructuralism) which have dominated Western social sciences. In this way, decolonial studies scholars seeking to break away from modernity’s epistemological frameworks in fact remain hostage to the false dualisms which have so plagued Western social sciences, such as discourse vs structure, or structure vs agency.

Scholars such as the Bolivian feminist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui have criticised the lack of concern of decolonial studies scholars for the material dimension, and in particular the political economy. She states, *‘instead of a ‘geopolitics of knowledge’, I propose the task of undertaking a “political economy” of knowledge...because it is necessary to leave the sphere of the superstructures in order to analyse the economic strategies and material mechanisms that operate behind discourses’* (2012: p102). A related criticism which has been levelled at decolonial studies scholars has been the tendency to homogenise the subjects of the Global South, so that all of those on the other side of the ‘colonial divide’ are treated as if they were equally negatively affected by the logics of modernity/coloniality, regardless of whether they are a university academic or a member of a rural indigenous community, for example. This can lead to urban academic ‘elites’, either in Latin America or in the diaspora, placing themselves in the centre of their own decolonial theory as subjects of decolonisation, leading Gayatri Spivak to proclaim *‘every Global South elite person is selling alternative epistemologies’* (Davis et al, 2019: p69). As Rivera Cusicanqui points out, this failure to engage with internal dynamics and differentiate between the subjects of decolonisation is deeply problematic, as it can lead to those who are arguably most affected by the ongoing legacies of colonialism, rural black, indigenous and peasant communities being excluded from the debate, or included in a tokenistic and often essentialising way, creating a disconnect between decolonial theory and the everyday realities and struggles of these agents/subjects of decolonisation (2012; 2018). Indigenous scholars Tuck and Yang remind us that for indigenous communities the notion of decolonisation is much

more than a metaphor, and is related to concrete demands around sovereignty, recuperation of territory and reparations (Tuck and Yang, 2012).

Proponents of the coloniality/modernity paradigm argue for the 'delinking' of decolonial studies from critical analytical tools and theories which could provide a political economy analysis to complement a focus upon the discursive dimension of reality. Yet the lack of any alternative tools which could perform the same task produces analytical flaws in theory pertaining to this paradigm:

decoloniality delinks from the knowledge of political theory and political economy, and the corresponding subject-formation these knowledges entail. There is here a sharp distinction between colonialism as it is commonly understood, and the more abstract phenomenon of coloniality....Decolonial studies thus elevates the purity of the decolonial project above all else, seemingly ignoring the constraints of actually-existing post-colonialism in actually-existing capitalist modernity...Decoloniality, as it is proposed here, emerges as the only true decolonial praxis (Ochieng Okith, 2021: N.P.)

The irony of such an approach is that in the haste to discard the analytical tools, categories and frames tainted by their association with modernity, it can err towards reproducing one of the most problematic characteristics of the modernity paradigms which it seeks to replace, by creating a quest for decolonial purity. Yet such theoretical purity is an illusion: the influence of Western paradigms of postmodernism and poststructuralism (as well as a range of other theoretical strands which emerge from modernist roots) upon the principle modernity/coloniality theorists is well documented, (Escobar, 2007; Rivera Cusicanqui, 2012; Grosfoguel, 2011). Indeed, the very notion of decolonisation itself emerges from Western intellectual centres, traditions and paradigms, rather than the alternative epistemologies of communities in the Global South. The notion of a pure 'delinking' from the logic of coloniality, put forward by Mignolo, is rather fanciful for any academic working in a university dominated by such logics (whether geographically located in the Global North or Global South). This point is important not in order to discount the theoretical offerings of scholars associated with the modernity/coloniality paradigm, but rather to make clear the impossibility of theoretical purity and to provide the reader with my understanding of how theory develops. Decoloniality emerged from within modernity, as a response to modernity, and hence has inevitably been shaped to some degree by these origins.

I believe that an emancipatory decolonial academic framework must create genuine processes of 'listening to the South' and engaging with other ways of knowing, as well as with the struggles of those on the frontlines of the struggle against neocolonialism and the violent colonial legacies. This requires that the researcher recognise their position within the social world, and embrace the 'translator' role

proposed by Santos. It must also mean renouncing any claim to universality or to a fully knowable ‘truth’ about reality which is discoverable to humans, without renouncing the attempt to make sense of reality and understand structures which are not immediately visible. Such a framework, I argue, must provide social scientists with a route out of the futile dualisms which so hinder social sciences. Only in this way, such a framework can be useful and relevant to the social movements, communities and activists who are the perhaps the principle agents of decolonisation.

Critical realism offers a non-dualist meta-theoretical ontological framework which emerges from modernity, yet which is able to withstand and adapt to the critique of modernity’s flawed history of epistemological domination, and compliment my ‘epistemologies of the South’ framework (D’Souza, 2010; Mannathukkaren, 2010; Tinsley, 2021). Critical realism’s epistemological relativism and recognition of the contextual, partial and socially contingent nature of knowledge makes room for an engagement with other ways of knowing and epistemological frameworks. At the same time, it offers a route out of the aforementioned dualisms and binds which have hindered modernism and postmodernism:

The significance of critical realism is that it is able to avoid the extremes of modernism and postmodernism....[it] is able to provide a basis for unifying some of the central concerns of both postcolonialism and modernist frameworks like that of Marxism while transcending them in a richer differentiated totality (Mannathukkaren, 2010:p323)

Equally importantly, it provides a framework which recognises the generative capacity of discourse, that is to say it has an ontological understanding of discourse, ideas and ways of knowing which assigns them the capacity to have material impacts upon the world and reproduce or transform social structures; yet it does this without becoming logocentric by affording the discursive dimension of reality the primordial status granted by postmodern, poststructuralist and many decolonial scholars.

Ochieng Okoth states that,

When we speak about decolonisation today, we should understand that we have something to learn from such attempts to articulate a truly decolonising practice, one which does not eschew serious discussions of self-determination, sovereignty and, yes, of the nation-state itself, in favour of a purely epistemic decolonisation. (2021; N.P.)

My theoretical framework provides the ideal basis to learn from just such a praxis, on the terms of the protagonists themselves. It offers the possibility of deepening a decolonial analysis by bridging the material and discursive dimensions of reality.

Enclosures, value struggles and the outside

In order to lay the foundations for a research process which is focussed upon the learning and knowledge processes of social movements, I draw upon the work of scholar activist Massimo De Angelis. His work, shaped by his own praxis and experience with social movements and often associated with the Open Marxist tradition, provides a persuasive ontological account of the relationship between social movement struggles and capital, which for him is defined by continuous value struggles. Crucially, he rejects the conceptualisation of capitalism as an all-encompassing system, positing instead that some aspects of social life are characterised by non-capitalist relations and values. By drawing upon De Angelis' ontological framework, we are also able to appreciate the importance of the cultural, subjective dimensions of social movement struggles within a broader structural analysis of class struggle.

For De Angelis, capital can be understood as a dynamic social force which seeks to convert all value practices to its own profit-making logic. It is a force with a strong capacity for self-preservation, which means it thrives upon adapting to challenges and overcoming limits to its pursuit of monetary value. He describes how capital (re)produces itself through *enclosures* of commons (for example privatisation of public services and natural resources, land grabs, patents etc), creating and expanding markets, and then forcing people into the markets through '*disciplinary integration*' processes which '*shape norms of interaction and social production*' through '*continuous dispensation of rewards and punishment*' (De Angelis, 2014:p81). Hence, enclosures are the 'generative mechanism' by which capital creates and expands markets, and are underpinned by this self-preserving logic:

the dispossession of life-time (i.e., labor exploitation), operated by capital through its systemic feedback loops pitting workers against others, can sustain itself only through periodically dispossessing alternative means of social reproduction and destruction/decomposition of corresponding communities (ibid: p300).

Enclosures, by their nature, are processes of social conflict, which for De Angelis is ubiquitous within social reality. Central to his ontological conceptualisation is the framing of this social conflict as *value struggles*:

enclosures are a value practice that clashes with others. It is either capital that makes the world through commodification and enclosures, or it is the rest of us - whoever is that 'us' - that makes the world through counter-enclosures and commons. The net results of the clashes among these social forces and their corresponding value practices Marx calls 'class struggle' (ibid:p134).

Central to De Angelis' ontological conceptualisation is the dialectic, implied in the above citation, between capitalist development and working class struggle. This dialectic of struggle adds to the dynamism of capital because it

drives its capacity to adapt and renew itself...capital reacts and adapts to these perturbations, developing new forms, absorbing, enclosing, channeling, redividing within the wage hierarchy, co-opting, and repressing, and the mix of these will depend on the cost-benefit calculus in given situations (ibid; p300)

De Angelis contends that nowhere in the world does capitalism represent the entire system of values and relationships of human society: there are always spheres of relationships and values which fall outside the logic of capital. That is, our world *'is not capitalism: it is much larger and wider than that'* (ibid:p34). This assertion has an important implication: it means that we do not live in capitalism - even in countries where capitalism is most developed and embedded, there is always an outside - which is the social relations that are determined at least partly outside of the logic of the capitalist system, that is, non-capitalist social relations, which could include acts of mutual aid and solidarity; in collective community acts such as *mingas*;³ in the act of playing; or even the preparation of food (ibid). For De Angelis, the key question for those who want to see a change in the dominant value system is how do we (re) produce, sustain and extend an outside of capital's value practices? Struggles which seek social change are an:

...exterior that emerges from within, a social space created through the creation of relational modes and patterns that are not only different but also incompatible with the capital relations practices. That is our exterior, the sphere of value practices outside those of capital, and confronting them. That outside is contingent and contextual because it emerges from concrete struggles ... our outside is the sphere of commons production (ibid, p34)

This citation emphasises the role played by all concrete social struggles – from a campaign against the privatisation of a public service, a fight against the entry of a mining multinational into a territory, or a struggle for housing - beyond their principal, explicit objectives (for example, the non-privatisation of the service), as sites of the production and reproduction of non-capitalist values. Understood in this way, the central challenge for social movements and each group or individual interested in social transformation involving the end of capitalism – is the question of how to articulate these 'diverse and interconnected' struggles around new value practices, so that 'new common meanings arise' (Ibid, p239), in order to extend and consolidate that exterior. He contends that social movements often produce commons through their struggles, and that production of commons can be an important element in overcoming divisions in the social body between diverse struggling subjects (ibid:p238).

³ *'Minga is a quechua word used by various ethnic groups throughout the Andes to refer to unwaged community work, in which men, women, and children all participate in pretty much convivial ways'*. (Da Angelis, 2014b:p175)

There is no universally agreed definition of the commons, and indeed the term's abstract nature can facilitate a level ambiguity and incongruence amongst understandings of the term within academic literature. Bollier contends that the commons should be understood as a process, and hence utilises the verb 'commoning':

at once a paradigm, a discourse, an ethic, and a set of social practices...More than a political philosophy or policy agenda, the commons is an active, living process... the social practices of commoning—acts of mutual support, conflict, negotiation, communication and experimentation that are needed to create systems to manage shared resources. This process blends production (self provisioning), governance, culture, and personal interests into one integrated system. (Bollier, 2016:p2).

Bollier posits that 'commoners' are usually linked by focus on:

reclaiming their "common wealth," in both the material and political sense. They want to roll back the pervasive privatisation and marketisation of their shared resources—from land and water to knowledge and urban spaces—and reassert greater participatory control over those resources and community life. (ibid)

Hence, the activity of *commoning* serves to rebuild social fabric and interconnections (between people and also with nature) which have been diminished by the individualising, destructive drive of capital. For Bollier, commoning

...helps build new aspirations and identities... the commons introduces people to new social roles that embody wholesome cultural values and entail both responsibility and entitlement....commoning cultivates new cultural spaces and nourishes inner, subjective experiences that have far more to do with the human condition and social change. (ibid:p4)

The foregoing citation from Bollier alludes to something which will become central to the analysis in this thesis: that the commons can be understood as sites of alternative social values and political socialisation which produce alternative learning and knowledge production processes.

However, De Angelis points out that it would be wrong to fall into a simplistic binary which casts the commons as an always 'good' alternative to capitalism's 'bad'. The commons does not necessarily mean utopia, and '*we certainly cannot claim that an expanded reproduction of commons will lead us inevitably to utopia*' (De Angelis, 2013:p607). De Angelis posits a more complex relationship between capital and the commons. He depicts the commons as themselves terrains of struggle which can be co-opted by capital in order to overcome crises (ibid).

The 'outside' to which De Angelis refers is, of course, a metaphor for all non-capitalist social relations and value practices. However, this outside is not defined by 'abstract principles', but rather it is '*constituted as a concrete and sensuous process*' shaped by social realities and experiences. Furthermore, social relations and value practices have a spatio-temporal dimension: that is, all social relationships and value practices occur within a space (or multiple spaces) and time (or multiple times). These spaces may be temporary (such as an occupation), or they may be more fixed as in the case of the collective territories of indigenous communities. Just as De Angelis argues that capitalism is not a system that encompasses everything, neither could it be said that the social relations and values of these processes and spaces are free from capitalist logic. Rather, his ontology is one of dialectical '*co-existence, in which the continuous character of enclosures...opens the door for its mirror image: the continuous character of the commons*' (De Angelis, 2014: p306). In this way, the seeds of an alternative society are contained within the real, concrete, everyday experience of communities and social movements.

De Angelis' ontology is particularly useful for grounding an analysis of social movement knowledge and learning processes. Over recent decades, the expansion of neoliberalism has driven enclosure processes in the terrain of knowledge, whilst at the same time important social movement struggles have resisted, produced and sustained knowledge commons - what Santos refers to as the struggle for epistemological justice.

The theoretical framework set out in the foregoing discussion provides me with an ideal grounding for a research process in line with the origins and ethos of this research process outlined elsewhere. Santos' *Epistemologies of the South* approach provides me with an epistemological framing which opens up the question of knowledge from an axiological, decolonial perspective. Santos makes a crucial break with the universalising tendency of capitalist modernity, yet without falling into the logocentrism relativism of some postmodern literature in the West, hence providing a platform for me to engage with the diverse epistemologies, cultures and histories of the social movements which converse within the Nomadesc pedagogical process. Santos implores social scientists to reflect upon their role and that of their research, and to play the role of a facilitating translator for the epistemologies of the South, bringing them into counter-hegemonic dialogues. With this thesis I seek to take up Santos' imploration in order to contribute to a theory of translation which enables engagement with the Epistemologies of the South of the pedagogical initiative which is the focus of this research.

On the ontological level, whilst not explicitly drawn upon throughout the text, critical realism provides me with an underlying meta-theoretical grounding which shapes the way that I understand reality and

develop my analysis. Critical realism provides me with an ontological conceptualisation which overcomes the problematic binary between structure and agency, recognising their interrelated relationship and bringing both into the analytical gaze. It allows me to analytically engage with the hermeneutics of the protagonists of the research, without extracting them from the social realities and structures in which they are embedded. Hence, critical realism's ontological understanding runs throughout the thesis, and allows me to engage with and understand the different dimensions and complexities of social reality which have been counterposed as 'either/or' oppositions by other mainstream meta-theoretical approaches. This means that my research seeks to hold onto both the micro and the macro; as well as the discursive and the materialist dimensions of reality. Whilst proposing a theoretical model for understanding reality, critical realism is also congruent with epistemological framework of Santos because of its epistemological pluralism: the recognition that there exist different ways of knowing, and that all knowledge claims and accounts are 'partial, transient, and socially embedded' (Sayers, 2010 n.p).

De Angelis provides me with a compelling depiction of the ontology of the capitalist system which conditions the existence of most of the world's population, including those in which Nomadesc operate. By drawing upon De Angelis' framework, I am able to ontologically locate Nomadesc's pedagogical work⁴ in southwest Colombia as an 'outside' of capitalism, without claiming it to be a realm which is independent of capitalism, but rather as a co-existing, inter-linked dimension: nowhere is totally free of capitalism (at least in capitalist societies) but at the same time nowhere is totally submitted. De Angelis' conceptualisation of the 'outside' facilitates an analysis which goes beyond the economistic identities of workers and peasants, and to understand these as multi-dimensional, relational subjects of struggle embedded in histories, cultures and territories. In this way, De Angelis allows me to hold onto an analytical appreciation of role of macro-economic processes and structures, whilst avoiding the overly economistic tendencies of some orthodox Marxist approaches, and opening up to other dimensions of reality.

3.2 Methodology

Having established a theoretical framework which is rooted in a transformational view of social sciences and which understands knowledge as being embedded within social practices, I will now set out the ethically and politically committed methodological approach which I have developed in line with this framework. Figure 1 below provides a visual representation of my overall research framework. Since this

⁴ For a discussion of the broad, critical conception of pedagogy which underpins this thesis, see p41

research project is concerned with processes and dynamics which are not quantifiable but of a more intangible, often experiential nature, I employed an approach which relied exclusively on qualitative methods. In line with my theoretical framework, I draw upon a range of qualitative research methods to adopt an activist approach which integrates a popular education participatory research strategy known as ‘systematisation of experiences’ with an ‘engaged ethnography’ methodological approach inspired by Burawoy’s extended case method and applied to social movement activist research (Mathers and Novelli, 2007).

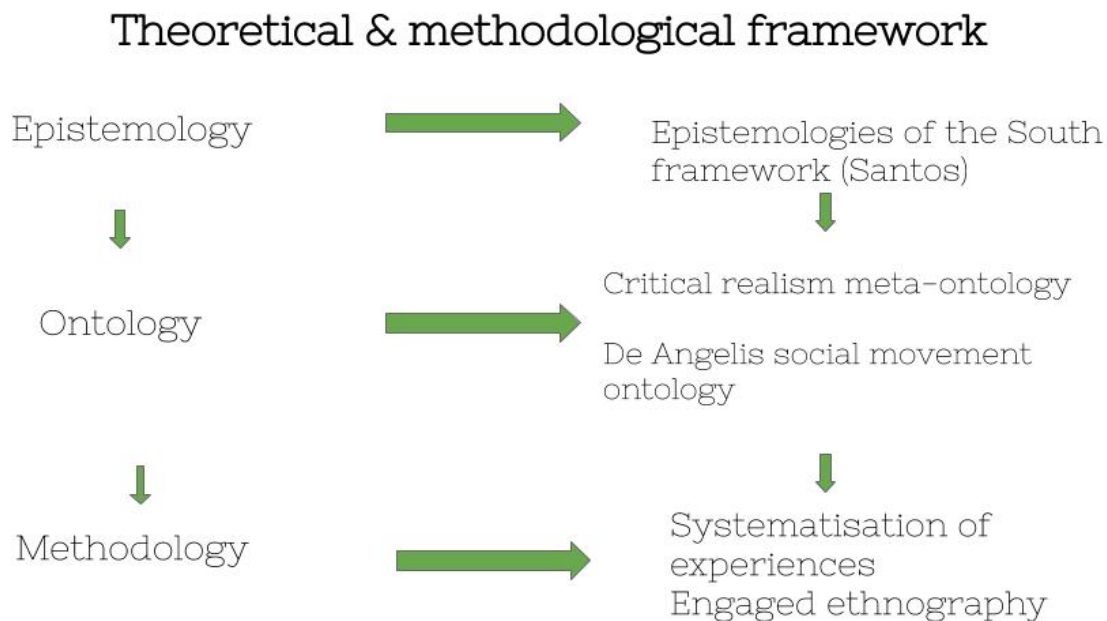


Figure 3.1

‘Activist research’

As demonstrated above, Santos’ epistemological framework involves dissolving the subject-object duality which has been a common characteristic of much mainstream academic research under hegemonic Western schematics in order to recognise the research subject as a knowing, thinking subject rather than as research object. This requires a rupture with the ‘naive’ concept of the social scientist as an objective or neutral observer, and recognising that science (and of course social science) is always imbued with structures of politics and power (Fine and Barreras, 2001; Gamson, 1999).

In recent decades there has been an increase in activist research within the social sciences, producing a rich body of literature from diverse disciplines and particularly from within critical anthropology, sociology and education (Choudry, 2013, 2015; Casas-Cortés et al, 2008; Speed, 2006; Higginbottom, 2008; Hall,

1979; Kapoor, 2009; Choudry and Kapoor, 2010; Burawoy, 2000; Carroll, (2004); Kinsman, 2006; Mathers and Novelli, 2007).

Activist research suggests a commitment which goes beyond the interests of academics and their research institutions to benefit the research subject and their struggle. Yet in reality this tension is often unsatisfactorily resolved, with benefit and credit being disproportionately enjoyed by the academic side (Choudry, 2013;p130). For Speed (2006), activist research is infused with tensions which are actually present in all academic research, but which are brought into focus in such an approach due to the dialogical relationship with research subjects. In other words, activist research is by its nature inherently messy. Hence, Speed argues that activist research always produced '*partial, contingent and up-for-debate*' findings, which she claims obliges activist researchers to deal up front with tensions and to acknowledge power relations (Speed, 2006: p74). Arguably the litmus test for activist research is the extent to which the needs, interests and thoughts of activists and social movement participants are centred within the process (Bevington and Dixon, 2005; Choudry, 2013).

In the case of my own research, as I outlined in my introduction chapter, it is a project which emerged from my own activism and my close relationship with Nomadesc, the 'subject' of my study. That is to say my activist relationship to Nomadesc predated my academic relationship to the organisation. This has meant that from the beginning, the conversations with Nomadesc and the movements it works with about their needs and wants with regards to the research were key influences in shaping the process, and decisions and discussions were made in an environment where mutual trust had been developed well before the research began. Hence, the activist ethos of my research was not in doubt: the challenge was to find a research methodology which was consistent with my activist research ethos and theoretical framework. I now present the two methodologies which I drew upon to create my methodological research strategy: engaged ethnography and systematisation of experiences. I also lay out why I feel that these two very different approaches provided an ideal combination for this doctoral research project.

Engaged ethnography

I drew upon an engaged ethnographic method which is informed by aspects of the ethnographic framework set out by Michael Burawoy, and subsequently developed into a politically and ethically committed activist ethnographic approach specifically for the study of social movements by Mathers and Novelli. Burawoy proposes an ethnographic approach in which the social scientist embraces their position within the social world in order to produce an engaged theory which is in constant dialogue with reality and is based on the inter-subjectivity between researcher and the subject of study (Burawoy, 1998, 2000).

He outlines a dialogical, reflexive social science and a methodological model underpinned by the recognition of the knowledge-generating potential of dialogues: dialogue between people; dialogue between events, dialogues between micro and macro levels, and dialogues between pre-existing theories and real-lived experience (Burawoy, 2009). Burawoy stresses that *'there can be no microproceses without macro forces, nor macro forces without microprocesses. The question is how we deal with their relationship'* (ibid,p9). He suggests that in this way ethnographers, through their direct experience in the social world, can challenge and reconstruct existing theory (ibid).

His 'extended case method' is based upon a series of what Burawoy refers to as methodological 'extensions' which allow us to move from the concrete to the abstract: the extension of the ethnographer into the lives of those they are researching (by way of active participation as opposed to mere observation); the extension of research over time and space (including repeated, extended periods of fieldwork); extension from micro-processes to macro-forces; and finally the extension of theory (Burawoy, 1999:p16-22). By integrating the 'systematisation of experiences' participatory research strategy into my approach, I add a vital further extension: from the individual researcher to a collective, participatory research process, which will further enrich the knowledge generated. These methodological extensions cohere with the complex, multi-layered critical realist conception of reality which I set out above.

The 'engaged ethnography' approach outlined by Mathers and Novelli specifically for the purpose of studying social movement 'strategies and practices', is based upon two essential pillars: solidarity and praxis. The approach seeks to *'forge a relationship of mutual benefit between social science and social movement based on solidarity and reciprocity'*, through a mutually beneficial dialogical engagement with those left out of the benefits of neoliberal globalisation (Mathers and Novelli, 2007;p245). They argue that through a process of intellectual exchange and debate, such an approach can build *'bridges of solidarity'* between social movements and the academy and both enrich the praxis of social movements and also make an important contribution to critical theory *'by grounding it more firmly in the everyday realities of resistance practices'* (ibid). For them, such an approach is a methodological enactment of the 'translation' work advocated by Santos (ibid). Hence, knowledge production and learning become a mutual and dialogical process.

Often implicit within such an approach is a certain trade-off between solidarity and critique: could an activist researcher, having actively participated in a social movement's organising, and developed political and emotional connections which accompany such participation demands – engage in objective critique of her comrades? I believe that constructive critique is an essential element of activism. Hence, it is

incumbent upon the researcher to be conscious of this tension, and to maintain a reflexive approach throughout the research process in order to negotiate this tension within their relationship with the social movement. At the same time, I am certain that the solidarity relationship which I have with Nomadesc, and the high levels of trust which underpin my relationship with the activists involved in my research process, provided me with access to data which simply would not have been otherwise accessible. This is due to the huge value of the currency of trust for activists organising in the repressive context of southwest Colombia.

As outlined elsewhere, this thesis is based on a collaborative research process which was designed with the activists who have been protagonists throughout its history. The research process was focussed upon a collective purpose: deepening our understanding of Nomadesc's pedagogical process, and 'translating' this process for broader audiences. Within our collective research design, there was consensus that this would not include engaging in an analysis of the micro-politics and internal power dynamics within Nomadesc and the pedagogical process. Whilst we appreciate the importance of such a body of work, the consensus was that such an analysis was not within the already broad scope of our research lens, which was more concerned with developing an analysis and understand the way that the praxis had developed, the learning processes which emerge, and the evolution of the various strands of thought which converge within the process. My thesis reflects this collective decision: to do otherwise would have been an unethical breach of confidence.

Systematisation of experiences

The participatory popular education research methodology known as the 'systematisation of experiences' gained prominence within the field of Latin American popular education during the 1990s (Torres Carrillo, 1999, 2010). This research strategy is based on the recognition that unique, valuable knowledge can be produced through the praxis of popular education processes, social movement struggles or other collective initiatives, and yet often may not be documented, reflected upon or shared for the benefit of those involved. Systematisation of experiences is a collective process which seeks to deepen understanding and improve practice through *collective* reflection and analysis of the experience by those who have been directly involved (Jara, 1997, 2015; Kane, 2012; Torres Carrillo, 2010).

Given that systematisation has been enthusiastically adopted by formal and informal education institutions, social movements, NGOs and academics, it is perhaps unsurprising that a number of varied approaches have emerged with diverging emphases. Some of its most prominent proponents argue that in its essence systematisation of experiences has an emancipatory tilt and should strengthen struggles for

social change by improving the praxis of emancipatory education or activist organising (Torres Carrillo, 2010; Jara, 2004). Torres Carrillo defines systematisation of experiences as *'an intentional, collective process of knowledge production which tries to recover and interpret the meanings that manifest themselves in social practices, with the purpose of strengthening them'* (Torres Carrillo, 2010:p196).

As a methodology which emerged from the emancipatory field of popular education and was subsequently adopted within academia, rather than the other way around, it is an approach which de-centres the academy, and places as much importance on the research process as the final product. In proposing a collectively-designed research route which foregrounds the multiple voices involved in any process in order to jointly reflect and analyse, the systematisation of experiences is a decolonial research methodology which can overcome the subject-object paradox which has characterised Western social science by the de-centring of the researcher. It therefore provides the ideal methodological vehicle for the politics of translation based on Santos' conception of knowledge-as-emancipation, as outlined in my theoretical framework.

I did not set out with Nomadesc to design a 'pure' systematisation process, or to be dogmatic about how we adopted this methodology. Rather, we sought to draw upon some of the tools offered by the systematisation of experiences and to be guided by some of the core principles identified by prominent Latin American proponents of the methodology. This meant in order to ensure a collectively designed and implemented, co-produced piece of research which could lead to deep, theoretical, collectively produced and validated conclusions. Whilst there is no 'one size fits all' systematisation approach, it is generally agreed that it is important that those who have been protagonists in the experience to be systematised play a significant role in its systematisation (Jara, 2004). This participation must include being involved in methodological and framework design, decision making, and analysis during the process (Jara, 20004; Van de Velde, 2008).

The initial phase of the systematisation generally involves a process which seeks to 'reconstruct', the lived experience, using any and every means of data available, and in line with the thematic threads identified for the process. This could involve interviews with people, archive and document analysis, newspaper articles, photos, videos, and much more (Torres Carrillo, 2004). This phase necessarily will require a process of organising and classifying information, which can facilitate a descriptive account of the lived experience in question, based upon multiple sources. Whilst this is not the main analytical phase, it should involve forming some initial analysis in identifying emergent themes and points of interest, which will later be fed into the subsequent phase of the process. It is desirable that this stage is to some extent carried

out in a collective manner, and has participation of people who have been protagonists in the process. It is important to begin this stage by identifying all of the information sources which exist (ibid).

The key element of the systematisation process seeks to '*discover the logic of what happened in the course of the experience*' (Taberes Fernandes et al, 2002,p26). Based on the initial framing of the systematisation process, this phase involves a collective process of reflection and analysis by those people who have lived the experience. The point here is not to arrive at a single, unified viewpoint, but to access the multiple voices in order to arrive at a deeper understanding of the lived experience. This phase will include identifying recurring themes which emerge from the process. The final phase involves summarising, writing up and socialisation of the analysis, which should include a process of feedback and validation with the protagonists of the experience (Torres Carrillo, 2010).

In summing up this discussion of my research methodologies, the rationale behind the combination of these two methodological approaches was that the ethnographic element should serve to compliment and reinforce the data which was produced through the systematisation of experiences collective research process. I felt that it was important to have a combination of approaches, given the uncertainty created by the complexity of the research context and my knowledge of the intensity and pressure of Nomadesc's human rights work; as well as my own lack of experience in implementing the systematisation of experiences methodology. I also felt that, given my extensive experience of working with Nomadesc and social movements in the region, my own ethnographic observations could provide valuable analytical insights which could enrich the research process.

A methodological journey

The remainder of this chapter traces my methodological journey, laying out the methods which my research process relied upon, and discussing the relationship between the systematisation process, my own doctoral research, and the ESRC research project mentioned above. It finishes with a discussion of certain salient points relating to my methodological approach. Throughout this section I seek to draw out the tensions, complexities, challenge and advantages of this approach and the research process, which was undoubtedly the most intense learning process of my life. I also address the ethical considerations which were taken into account in my research process.

I spent from March 2017- December 2018 engaged in extensive fieldwork in Colombia, based in the Nomadesc office in the city of Cali. During this time, I combined my research with my activism and became

heavily involved in different aspects of Nomadesc's human rights defence work. Upon arrival, I rented an apartment a few blocks from the office, and immediately immersed myself in Nomadesc's hectic ongoing work, which included a wide variety of tasks such as human rights accompaniment; producing human rights 'Urgent Action' documents; workshop planning and facilitation (including for some sessions of the UIP); and general support in the coordination of the UIP (all the while engaging in participant observation and keeping an ethnographic field journal). I immediately began to carve out my new role as a researcher - to hold meetings and informal conversations with members of the Nomadesc team in order to develop the design the systematisation of experiences process, as well as carrying out in-depth semi-structured interviews. The entire research process was carried out in Spanish, and a contact at a local university was paid to transcribe the texts (in Spanish). The excerpts which are used in the text were all translated into English by myself. I have tried to be as true as possible to the sense and feeling of the words as they were uttered by participants. However, as with any work of translation (and arguably any written text), it is impossible to fully capture or do justice to these hermeneutics.

As I had expected, the context was intense, and carving out space for research within the demands of Nomadesc's hectic work schedule was a challenge. As is amply demonstrated elsewhere in this document, the nature of Nomadesc's human rights work is unpredictable, and requires Nomadesc to react and respond to the ever-changing conjunctures of the region's social movements, their social struggles, and the political violence and repression which is targetted at activists. By way of example, in May 2017, two months after my arrival in Colombia, the population of Buenaventura on the Pacific coast embarked upon an historic 22 day civic strike which paralysed the entire city, along with Colombia's most important port. Along with half of the Nomadesc team, we relocated to Buenaventura for the duration of the strike as well as several days after, from where we played an active role in the human rights monitoring commission, in a context where human rights violations were being committed on a widespread scale. This role meant we were monitoring human rights during protests which were met with heavy police repression, including the use of tear gas and live bullets. It also meant that we were present for the negotiations between the strike committee and government representatives, with senior leaders of Nomadesc playing an important strategic advisory role which went beyond the 'traditional' human rights remit. We spent a lot of time gathering testimonies of victims of human rights violations, and liaising with various bodies in order to ensure medical access and support to victims. I also maintained ongoing communication with international solidarity networks to coordinate solidarity actions including pickets outside of the Colombian embassy in the UK, and wrote articles for alternative media outlets.

It would be impossible to find the words to encapsulate the intensity of the experience of the civic strike for all of us who were in some way part of those sleep-deprived, adrenalin-charged 22 days. The impact upon my research, and life, were enormous. They were days in which my researcher role became almost entirely subsumed to my role as an activist. It also completely turned Nomadesc's work agenda upside down, causing other activities to be postponed and cancelled (including meetings which had been planned in relation to the design of the systematisation of experiences process), and in the months following, the strike would continue to be a major focus for the organisation - further complicating my own research task. The experience of the civic strike led me to reflect upon my own role as an activist researcher, and to appreciate the challenge of engaging an organisation like Nomadesc in a participatory research process which requires time and effort at an organisational level. The intense, urgent nature of the context, and the reactive nature of Nomadesc's human rights work, required patience on my part with regards to the research process, and a recognition that the research would have to adapt to, and fit around, Nomadesc's work defending human rights. I quickly learned in this context that I must be opportunistic and pragmatic in order to advance the research process.

To provide an illustrative example of ongoing work which I was involved in beyond the research process, and the nature of the context, I will also briefly describe one period which was particularly intense. In December 2017, with Nomadesc I was heavily involved in arranging a football tournament between children and teenagers from five indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities in conflict-affected rural territories threatened with displacement, and in which armed groups were targetting the population and forcibly recruiting teenagers. The tournament, which was called 'Show Dispossession the Red Card', took place in an indigenous community in Cauca region and aimed to raise awareness amongst children and teenagers in the communities about the importance of collectively organising to defend their territories. It involved a huge amount of organising and preparatory work by all members of the Nomadesc team, including a series of prior workshops which we facilitated in each of the communities. The project was funded by the British trade union UNISON, and supported by the British anti-racism NGO Show Racism the Red Card. Two former professional footballers from the English Premier League, along with UNISON activists, attended the tournament as part of a solidarity delegation. The following day, the delegation attended the graduation of the first ever cohort of the UIP, a joyous occasion not only for Nomadesc but also for the graduates, many of whom had not been able to graduate from secondary school, let alone access university. One such student was 20 year old indigenous community activist Viviana Trochez Dagua.

Tragically, Viviana was murdered the very next day on 8th December 2017 in a massacre committed by an unidentified armed group in the indigenous territory of Cerro Tijeras. Her death had a huge impact upon Nomadesc and all of the UIP graduates. Nomadesc hired a bus in order for a delegation from the UIP, together with the international delegation, to travel to the Viviana's community for her funeral.

Whilst we were still reeling from Viviana's murder, another leader with whom we had worked closely was murdered by unidentified gunmen on 27th January 2018. Temistocles Machado, a well-known community leader from Buenaventura, had originally come up with the idea for the football tournament and we had worked together on the initiative from the beginning. He had also been a key leader at community level during the Buenaventura civic strike: we had stood with him as he organised his community in the face of brutal attacks by the police riot squad. These two murders had a huge emotional impact upon myself and every single member of the Nomadesc team, upon the UIP, and upon the social movements which Nomadesc works with. They also had a huge knock-on effect upon Nomadesc's work agenda, and by extension upon the research process: in both cases Nomadesc dedicated organisational staff time and resources to responding to the cases.

Social movement learning project

The approval of the aforementioned ESRC-funded social movement learning project in September 2017 would have important implications and provide a large boost for my own doctoral research process. It meant that from January 2018, the two year project would provide funding for the systematisation process which we were designing, and hence could be much more ambitious and comprehensive in scope. It also meant funding would be provided to enable us to contract a local researcher assistant to support the process; as well as facilitating a process of exchange and knowledge dialogue with social movements from Turkey, South Africa and Nepal. It came at a moment in which I had been able to make important progress in terms of interviews and participant observation, but had struggled to make progress with Nomadesc in the design of the systematisation process. At a time when organisational resources were more stretched than ever, and work schedules reeling from the backlog created by the civic strike, it was clear that the systematisation process had fallen down the pecking order of organisation's priorities. The approval of the project, with the prospect of a broad-ranging systematisation process and horizontal engagement with sister social movements across Asia, Africa and Europe altered this situation and provided added impetus on the part of Nomadesc, along with genuine excitement. Since the data collection for my own doctoral research process was closely aligned with the social movement learning project, the project also transformed my own research and meant it would benefit from the expanded

systematisation. As a result of my involvement in the project I extended my period of fieldwork in Colombia beyond what had initially been planned in order to be able to be involved in implementation of key aspects of the systematisation process.

We subsequently formed a research coordination team within Nomadesc to oversee the systematisation design and implementation. Two of Nomadesc's leading members, who have been anonymised in line with the project's agreed ethnical framework, were also part of the research coordination team, and support was received at different points of the data collection process by social work students from the local university carrying out their work experience with Nomadesc. Members of the Nomadesc team were involved in the design of every phase of the research design and implementation, to the extent that this was possible within the constraints of the organisation's busy schedule. Yet despite the increased impetus provided by the involvement in the social movement learning research project, the unpredictable, reactive and hugely demanding nature of Nomadesc's human rights work would prove throughout the entire process a hugely challenging dynamic in which to carry out a systematisation of experiences (further discussion below).

The preceding paragraphs provide a sense of the multi-layered complexity of the data collection process. Based primarily on the systematisation of experiences collective research strategy, the research process would provide data for both the broader social movement learning project and my doctoral thesis. At the same time, in line with the principles of the systematisation methodology and the research ethos set out above, the systematisation process must be relevant and useful to the protagonists of the experience in question: in this case, the Nomadesc team. Whilst each of these constituencies can be understood as broadly compatible and complimentary in terms of their thematic interests within the research, their expectations and needs could vary dramatically in terms of time frames, desired outputs, notions of how the research should be implemented etc. This complexity is discussed further below.

In designing the systematisation of experiences, we sought to draw upon central principles of the systematisation of experiences methodology in a pragmatic way in order to come up with a collaborative research process which was genuinely accountable to Nomadesc and which at the same time was practically realistic in the complex, intense context of social movement organising in southwest Colombia.

We aimed to develop a research strategy which functioned as a critical-reflective process of organising the 'experience' of the Nomadesc pedagogical process in order to arrive at a deeper understanding of it, and in the process to generate new learning processes and knowledge. This meant a research process which allowed for collective reflection amongst the individual and collective subjects – the activists and

social movements- who have created the history of the pedagogical process in question, in order to grasp the history of the process, the logic, meanings, actors and dynamics which have operated, emerged and interacted, and to seek to understand the knowledge and learning processes associated with the initiative.

From research questions to designing the systematisation: a multi-objective data collection process

Any systematisation of experiences process which is a collaboration between social movements and the academy must in the end respond to the various objectives, interests and needs of both within the process. In our ethical framework of solidarity, based upon Santos' conception of knowledge-as-emancipation, it was vital that we generate congruence and equality between the varying expectations of the different constituencies involved, through a dialogical, collaborative approach to research design and implementation. Hence, equal importance was given to the needs and expectations of Nomadesc from the research process as to the academic constituencies involved.

The systematisation of experiences process which we collectively designed cannot be understood as standard academic research process, but rather as a pedagogical initiative which generated knowledge for a range of objectives and outputs, including the academic research outputs of my own thesis and the broader social movement learning research project. This meant a multi-level approach which allowed for variation between the research questions (of my own doctoral research and the social movement learning research project) and the objectives of the systematisation of experiences process. That is to say, the objectives of our systematisation of experiences process were designed in order to produce data which would respond to the research questions, as well as the needs and expectations of Nomadesc. Whilst it can be seen from below that there is a high degree of convergence amongst these, the objectives of the systematisation pertain to the systematisation *process* as well as the end *products*.

Working with members of the Nomadesc team, we collectively produced the following objective which would guide our systematisation of experiences process:

General Objective:

To reach a deeper understanding of the pedagogical process that is now called Intercultural University of the Peoples (historical, epistemological, philosophical, territorial construction and conceptual evolution, and the contextual aspects that influenced and helped to structure the evolution of the process) to strengthen the current UIP process and consolidate the UIP as a national and international educational reference point for alternative pedagogy.

We then developed a set of **specific objectives**, which for the purposes of the systematisation process would serve as our *transversal axes*, guiding the process of data collection and subsequent analysis:

- *Uncover/Recover the historical memory of the process, based on the experiences of its protagonists during the past 18 years (2000-2018)*
- *Analyse the evolution of the process and its relationship with national and international social and political conjunctures, and in particular the social struggles of southwest Colombia (specifically in the territories of the communities and movements which have been part of the pedagogical process)*
- *Document the learning, knowledge and concepts which have been weaved and constructed during the history of the history of the pedagogical process*

Beyond these immediate objectives for the process, two broader, **emergent objectives** were identified in recognition of the inherent pedagogical and political value of the systematisation research process:

- *Strengthen, deepen and consolidate interaction and collaboration between the social movements which are part of the pedagogical process in question. This objective demonstrates an explicitly political intention: that the process of coming together to collectively reflect upon the experiences of the pedagogical initiative should lead to a strengthening of the intercultural collaboration and organising upon which the process is based.*
- *Encourage and deepen the exchange of experiences with other pedagogical-organisational processes in other regions or countries, by providing the UIP with an increased capacity to understand and communicate its history and knowledge and learning processes*

The latter two objectives are central to the alternative character of the systematisation proposal, because they are rooted in the explicitly political intention that the research process should serve not just to understand, but also to strengthen the pedagogical process which is the subject of its inquiry.

Research phases

The research process during my time in Colombia was divided into three phases which were chronologically distinct, however in practice there was necessarily some overlap between certain activities of the different phases (see figure 3.2 below). In hindsight, I consider the months between March and October (after the approval of the broader research project) to have been a preparatory period, during which I was engaging in participant observation, adapting to the context and the internal dynamics of Nomadesc, conducting initial interviews, and developing a strategic route map for the process of designing the systematisation process, based on conversations with members of the Nomadesc team. From my arrival onwards I also carried out ethnographic participant observation, maintaining my own field journal. The contents of my ethnographical observations were not shared with the Nomadesc team on an ongoing basis, but would often later feed into my input in the systematisation process for collective consideration. Throughout, I would discuss, check and validate ideas and seek opinions.

<p><u>Preparatory phase:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participant observation • Initial interviews 	<p>March 2017-October 2017</p>
<p><u>Phase 1: Recovery of the lived process; organisation of existing; chronology and initial analysis</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organise and classify existing information • Analysis of existing records and materials • Interviews with protagonists of the design and coordination of the process in order to map the history • A draft mapping of the process, themes, moments, axes (to guide design of second phase) • Design of the spaces /activities of collective reflection and interviews for the second phase 	<p>November 2017-May 2018</p>
<p><u>Phase 2: Collective recovery of the lived process; background reflection</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus groups • Workshops for reflection and collective analysis; thinking about the future of the UIP • Analytical interviews with protagonists 	<p>May 2018-December 2018</p>
<p><u>Phase 3: Feedback and validation of findings, production and review of final products</u></p>	<p>Jan 2019-December 2019</p>

Figure 3.2: Fieldwork research phases

Research methods

My doctoral thesis draws upon a variety of research methods which are associated with the systematisation of experiences and engaged ethnographic methodologies:

Review and analysis of historical documentary materials

Over its two decades of existence, Nomadesc has accumulated a large breadth of diverse historical documents relevant to the systematisation, including bibliographic materials, project proposal documents, political declarations, audio-visual archives, human rights 'urgent actions', political declarations, students' investigations, and much more. The review and analysis of this documentation formed an important subsidiary component of our systematisation process. In phase 1 of the process, this method served to inform the historical reconstruction of the process and to guide the design of the second phase, as well as to identify and locate documents which could assist in developing an understanding and analysis of the logics of the process during the throughout its history.

Semi-structured interviews

I carried out a total of 38 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with people from a wide range of movements and sectors, with varying relationships to the pedagogical process. These included past and present members of the Nomadesc team, past and present facilitators of the educational process, leaders of social movements and organisations which are part of the pedagogical process, ex-participants of the pedagogical process. The aim of these interviews was to develop a deep understanding of the history of the process, in order to identify the different phases and their logics and dynamics from the perspectives of those who have been most closely and consistently involved. I also sought to use the interviews to track the evolving dynamics and conjunctures which formed the context in which the pedagogical process had evolved.

Totalling more than fifty hours of audio recordings, these broad-ranging semi-structured interviews included such themes as memories and anecdotes of the pedagogical process, political analysis of the local, regional and international political context, discussion of the nature of the social struggles in the region, and the experiences and realities of social movements in southwest Colombia.

Territorial Pedagogical Memory Discussion Groups

The systematisation involved five Territorial Pedagogical Memory Discussion Groups (*conversatorios*). These were central to the methodology, as they were the forums created specifically to enable collective reflection by participants, aimed at deepening understanding and discovering the underlying logics and dynamics of the process. In keeping with the pedagogy of the process, which has been deeply connected to the realities and territories of the participating organisations and movements, these discussion groups

were staged in territories considered to be zonal hubs (reflecting the zonal organisation of the diploma programme). They were divided as follows: Valle del Cauca (staged in the Nomadesc office, Cali); Pacific (staged in Buenaventura); Cauca (staged in the rural Afro-Colombian community of La Toma, municipality of Suarez); Huila and Southern Cauca (staged in the city of Popayan); Cali (specific to protagonists from the early years, mainly trade unionists, human rights activists and urban community processes, staged in the Nomadesc office).

These activities replicated the inter-cultural, inter-sectoral and intergenerational dialogues which characterise the pedagogical process, with the aim of collectively constructing knowledge about the process itself. Nomadesc team members were involved in the methodological design, which in turn was updated and adjusted according to a collective evaluation which followed each discussion group. Nomadesc team members were responsible for identifying and inviting attendees for each of the five activities, in consultation with the broader research team. These activities were the forums in which the research team took a back seat, and allowed the subjects who worked to create, mould and sustain the process to guide the systematisation. Hence the flexibility of the horizontal, participatory methodology, and the emphasis on allowing participants to fully articulate the meanings, emotions and memories which the process evoked for them.



Photo 3.1: Territorial Pedagogical Memory Discussion Group in La Toma community. Credit: Nomadesc

Activist ethnographic observation through participation

Throughout my extended period of fieldwork I was fully embedded within the Nomadesc team, and participated in meetings and activities in many respects as a full member of the team. This provided me with an in-depth appreciation of the dynamics and processes of the organisation, but also provided some tensions and disadvantages which are discussed below.

Feedback and validation workshop

One of the mechanisms designed to ensure accountability within the research process was a feedback and validation workshop, in which a summary of the principal research findings to emerge from the systematisation of experiences process were presented to participants who had been involved in the systematisation process. The aim was to feed the summaries and analysis back to the protagonists of the pedagogical process in order to gather feedback and validate the main components and elements of the research findings, and ensure that they accurately reflect and interpret the learning and knowledge processes which had emerged throughout the research process. This workshop was also aimed at identifying how the research process, and the knowledge produced, could be used to improve the praxis of the pedagogical process and be incorporated into strategic action plans. Unfortunately, participation was lower than had been expected for this activity, due to it falling within a particularly hectic time in the calendar of Nomadesc and the social movements involved. However, the session provoked a lively discussion and provided important insights and feedback. The main discussion points were centred upon terminologies used (ensuring these reflected Nomadesc's own way of articulating aspects of their praxis); interpretations and clarifications of citations; and finally a lot of discussion about how to build upon the research, what follow-up work was needed to consolidate the process and ensure that findings were reflected within Nomadesc's praxis.

Participation

The broad chronological, territorial and sectoral scope of the systematisation of experiences made for a particularly challenging conundrum of how to identify participants for the research process. How to ensure adequate representation of participants in terms of the variables of intersectional ethnic, cultural and political identities, as well as the variable of their relationship to the pedagogical process? Constraints of time, resources and the broader demands of Nomadesc's work agenda; limitations of availability of leading activists; plus the practical limitation of reliance upon contact networks and connections, all played a role in determining (and limiting) participation within the systematisation process. The process

of identifying and contacting participants for the workshop was a collective process, which was necessarily led by Nomadesc, as the holder of the contacts and keeper of personal relationships.

Another challenge was the extremely demanding, unpredictable dynamics of social movements and their organising in conflict-affected and repressive context of the southwest of Colombia, not least for a human rights organisation like Nomadesc which by its nature must respond to unpredictable events (human rights violations). On many occasions workshops or interviews were postponed or cancelled, and many invitees were unavailable or had to cancel at the last minute. The latter ended up overtaking the former, in so much as a heavy dose of opportunism and pragmatism was required, meaning that full representativity could not be guaranteed. The aim was not to be dogmatic or scientific in terms of the demographics of participants, but rather to achieve an adequate level of representativity for this qualitative research process. Given the circumstances, I am satisfied that a reasonable level of representativity was achieved. The tables below demonstrate the demographic breakdown of the territorial discussion group participants and interviewees. Of a total of 78 people who participated in the five territorial workshops, 37 were women, whilst of a total of 38 interviewees, 14 were women.

Another challenge with regards to participation related to chronological phasing of the process and the relative prevalence of different demographics at different phases of the programme: for example, it was difficult to secure the participation of a broad section of the participants from the earliest phase of the diploma programme, which was when trade union participation was highest.

Territorial workshop participants:

Sector	No. participants
Trade union	7
Indigenous	25
Afro-Colombian	9
Peasant	5
Student	3
Women's organisations	1
Human rights/NGOs	10
Urban community and civic organisations	6
Religious	2
Victims' organisations	4

No organisation	2
Other	4
Total:	78

Figure 3.3: Territorial discussion groups participants by sector

Sector	No. participants
Trade union	6
Indigenous	8
Afro-Colombian	5
Peasant	2
Youth collectives	4
Women's organisations	1
Human rights/NGOs	4
Urban community and civic organisations	1
Victims' organisations	1
No organisation	2
Academia	4
Total:	38

Figure 3.4: Interviewees by sector

Reflections on a research journey

The following section discusses some of the challenges, benefits and drawbacks of the research context, the methodological approach which I adopted, and around my own positionality in relation to the research. From the inception, it was clear to me that my doctoral thesis does not fit neatly into what could be deemed as an orthodox approach to such an endeavour. My level of engagement and proximity to the research subject; Nomadesc's involvement in the process from the very beginning; my activist motivation and commitment to contribute something to Nomadesc through the research; and my involvement in the broader social movement learning research project all provided particular methodological requirements and challenges.

Research context

As a research context, the unpredictable, intense dynamic which surrounded Nomadesc's work as a human rights organisation made for a particularly challenging scenario. It is a context which could be characterised as one of constant crisis. The reactive nature of Nomadesc's work is manifested in the way

that its members must be permanently ready to drop everything in order to respond to the requirements of the human rights context of social movements in the region. Added to this, the emotional tension and stress created by the violent and repressive context created an environment in which it could often be difficult not only to get the Nomadesc team to engage with the systematisation of experiences process, but also at times to maintain a perspective on the importance of our research process in the face of urgent matters of life and death which we were regularly dealing with. When things got particularly intense, my own doctoral research seemed to shrink into insignificance, and the systematisation of experiences process slipped even further down Nomadesc's list of priorities.

Whilst the context would have been a challenging one in which to carry out any type of research methodology, it held particular complexities for the implementation of the systematisation of experiences with its collective ethos which required the involvement and input of Nomadesc team members throughout the process, beginning with the design phase. Although the Nomadesc team had been very clear about the importance and value of the systematisation of experiences process for the organisation, the reality of the demands of their work meant that it proved a struggle to get these under-resourced and over-worked activists to devote time to the collective process on an ongoing basis, even after the social movement learning project had been approved. I had to come to terms with and embrace the innate messiness of our research context and indeed of our collective systematisation of experiences process. This meant being willing to adapt and alter the research route map, phasing and design in order to fit with Nomadesc's ever-changing schedule, and seeking ways to further facilitate Nomadesc's engagement whilst creating the minimal amount of burden upon the organisation. It also at times meant having to bypass the collective decision-making process in order to 'cut corners' and ensure that things got done when it was clear that to the contrary would be to the detriment of the research.

Whilst the challenge described above could be immensely frustrating at times, it was also completely in line with what I had expected before undertaking the research, and gave me a hugely valuable insight into the complexity of carrying out co-produced, collaborative research with activists in a repressive context such as that of southwest Colombia. The messiness of our research process was full of tensions, contradictions, dynamics which were rooted in differing perspectives and priorities, and which forced us create a particularly reflective process which I believe ultimately was enriched and benefitted from these methodological tensions.

Reflections on the systematisation of experiences

The systematisation of experiences is a methodology which requires a high amount of reflexivity and flexibility on the part of the academic researcher, in order to interrogate, relinquish and overcome the orthodox researcher role associated with Western research which is steeped in knowledge hierarchies and power relations (Santos, 2007; Tuhiwai Smith, 2013). It was not only a challenge seeking Nomadesc's engagement with the process, but also when they did engage I often found myself frustrated with the collective process. My desire for things to be meticulously planned and structured was often at odds with Nomadesc's more relaxed, free-flowing and flexible approach. In the early phases of the design of the process, I would sometimes disagree with decisions which were collectively reached. I realised that I had to let go of my somewhat idealised vision of how the systematisation of experiences process should look, and adapt a more pragmatic, flexible approach to the process which could better adapt to Nomadesc's dynamic and *modus operandi*. I came to realise that herein lay the beauty of the systematisation of experiences approach: it was not 'mine'. Nomadesc really did feel ownership of the process. I had an important role to play and much to contribute, and believe that this contrast in approaches provided a useful counterbalance which was beneficial to the process. I was certainly not driving the agenda or in control of the process, and had to go with the collective flow. Sometimes, this might mean delays and tangents to the process, but it very often also meant the process was improved and enriched. Above all, it provided a high level of accountability and validity to the process to Nomadesc and the social movements of the UIP.

An example of the potential of this collective approach was in the way we approached the design and facilitation of the territorial workshops. The creative tension between my inclination to want a high level of phased planning, alongside Nomadesc's more relaxed, organic approach to doing things (rooted in vast experience and knowledge of the nature of working with social movements in southwest Colombia) meant that we created a flexible, dialogical planning process for each of the workshops. After each workshop, we would collectively evaluate the previous one, and agree adjustments to the methodology for the following one. Hence the systematisation of experiences process was a dialogical, collective learning process for all of us who were involved.

One difficulty which we had with the process emerged from the very broad chronological framing. This framing meant a vast scope which included almost two decades of history. It would be impossible for a research process to do justice to a process with such a long, rich history. Such a stretched framing also meant that the participation in the process could only be partial, in that only a small fraction of those who

had been involved in the process over the years were able to participate, and practicalities also meant that those who did participate were more likely to be those that had maintained a relationship with Nomadesc. Whilst the systematisation process seeks to bring out the varied and differing voices of those who have been involved in the process, the extensive time frame and the nature of people's involvement meant that the voices of those who have been involved in the process for a sustained period of time ended up being given primacy in the writing process, as we sought to uncover the logic of the process and the transformations which occurred during different phases. Inevitably in such a broad process, some voices end up being silenced. The benefit of the chronological framing of the entire history of the project was that it allowed us to track these trends and the evolution of the process. It also meant that it provided Nomadesc with a 'complete' study which allows them to present their pedagogical work to the world and draw historical lessons.

This stretched framing perhaps also had something to do with difficulty which we had in engaging some participants in critical reflection over the pedagogical process. There was a tendency, particularly amongst those who had been involved a long time ago or for a short period of time, to engage in effusive praise of the process, and to offer anecdotes related to their involvement. This is entirely understandable given the way that human memory works: it is unrealistic to expect participants to engage in critical reflection upon the micro-processes of an initiative which they were involved with 15-20 years ago. In the case of participants, it may also be unrealistic to expect people to hold onto a critical analysis of the finer detail of a pedagogical process in which their participation was on a weekly or fortnightly basis over a period of only a few months. Upon reflection, a shortcoming of our research design lay in failing to find a structured, methodological way of generating such critical reflection.

Part of what gave the systematisation of experiences process added legitimacy in the eyes of Nomadesc, and also in terms of our research ethos of solidarity and reciprocity, was that it was not solely geared towards the production of academic outputs. Rather, it was a process which was very clearly geared towards the needs of Nomadesc and the movements they work with. This meant firstly, that the process itself had intrinsic pedagogical and political value; and secondly, that we agreed process outputs which went beyond the academic outputs of my doctoral thesis and the social movement learning research project. In terms of the value of the process, in bringing together such a broad and diverse collective of activists who had been involved throughout the history of the process in order to collectively reflect upon what had gone on, many of those involved commented upon the rarity of the opportunity to pause, take stock and collectively look back upon what had been achieved, to evaluate and to draw lessons. There

was also a strong sense of connection and of nostalgia in the coming together of people who had shared inspirational, dramatic and often traumatic histories of organising and educating together.

In some cases the process sparked a commitment from those involved to reconnect and revive collaborative links of political organising, for example in the Cauca territorial workshop with indigenous and Afro-Colombian community representatives. The encounter and interaction with social movements in Nepal, South Africa and Turkey also had important political and pedagogical benefits for Nomadesc, spurring new solidarity connections and generating important learning processes about the similarities and differences between the various struggles of the movements involved. The non-academic outputs of the process which we agreed included an interactive timeline, a video documentary, a pamphlet document which summarised the systematisation of experiences process and key findings, and a compilation document of the transcriptions of all of the interviews and workshops throughout the process.

Overall, I feel that the multi-method approach, combining the systematisation of experiences with an engaged ethnography, provided an effective combination for engaging with the ‘epistemologies of the South’ of Nomadesc’s pedagogical process. In many ways, engaged ethnography provided the ideal foil for the systematisation process, allowing me to deepen my insights and compliment the knowledge which was produced collectively through the systematisation process. Whilst far from a ‘pure’ and ideal systematisation of experiences process, we were able to create a genuinely empowering, collective and accountable process which generated knowledge through a process of collective reflection. Therefore, this doctoral research is genuinely rooted in the social movement knowledge processes which interact with and underpin the Nomadesc pedagogical process. I believe our research process puts into practice the ‘translator’ role for the social scientist which Santos proposes, and demonstrates the potential for a mutually beneficial, equal relationship between social movements and the academy.

Absences

In reflecting upon the research journey, one interesting aspect of the collaborative process are the silences or absences: the themes or areas which were not identified by Nomadesc in the research design process, and which didn’t emerge as significant subjects within the data collection process. Due to limitations of space (and in line with the research ethos), this thesis doesn’t include an extended discussion of absences, but it would be remiss not to briefly mention some of those which surprised me as a researcher and as somebody with a working knowledge of the inner-functioning of Nomadesc’s work.

As an organisation which was founded and has always been led by women, it surprised me that the issue of gender wasn't identified by Nomadesc in the research design, and was notable only by its absence in the emergent themes within the research process. Despite having touched upon gender in my interviews and ethnographic fieldnotes (and having written elsewhere about gender within the Nomadesc process), in writing my thesis I decided to prioritise the themes which emerged strongly from the protagonists. In recent years, gender has gradually become more of a focus within social movements in Colombia, including within Nomadesc's work. Yet this is a relatively recent development, in what remains a highly macho, patriarchal society. Nomadesc has developed its own approach to gender, and has been resistant to mainstream gender approaches which are predominant in Colombia due to what the organisation perceives as their disconnection from the social realities of Colombian communities, instead viewing them as linked to certain circles within the academy (current leading Nomadesc members, and diploma student during early years, interview, 2018). Arguably, in a decolonial praxis which places much importance upon the varied identities which converge within the pedagogical process, other political and cultural identities have thus far been prioritised.

Another theme which I expected to be more prominent within the research process was that of international solidarity and its role within Nomadesc's praxis. I had hoped that the process would generate collective reflection upon the way that international solidarity can be drawn upon as a pedagogical tool, as well as a valuable source of human rights protection; as well as the way that international solidarity work has evolved with time. Yet within the process, the collective reflection by participants remained firmly focussed upon the local and national level. This is perhaps reflective of some of the challenges which activists face in sustaining international solidarity collaboration on an ongoing basis, particularly in intense contexts such as southwest Colombia where the 'local' struggle demands so much time and energy.

Positionality, power dynamics and researcher identity

Throughout the entire process I gave a large amount of consideration to my own positionality in relation to the research, and sought to build a high degree of reflexivity into my work. This meant being aware of my identity as a white, Western male researcher in a conflict-affected Global South context. Whilst the collective research approach; my familiarity with the context and the organisation; and my longstanding relationship with Nomadesc means that I was easily accepted into the team and often told I was '*just one of the compañeros*', I was acutely aware that there are complexities in relation to my positionality and researcher identity.

I first became involved with Nomadesc as a 22 year old back in 2007, recently arrived in Colombia with little knowledge of the country's social reality, history or even the language. From the beginning, my role within Nomadesc had been that of apprentice, in an organisation which is full of expertise and experience, and which is 'theorised' in its own right. Most of the organisation's team members are university graduates, and some are high profile activists within the Colombian social movement scene. As an inexperienced foreigner, my role was always one of accompaniment, translation and support. I assumed the role of *confidante*, *compañero*, friend, adviser. Trust is a precious commodity for social movements within the repressive context of southwest Colombia, and hence my closeness to the subject of the research was not only a benefit, but also an indispensable requirement. In my previous experience of solidarity activism in Colombia, and from conversations with comrades, the role of a foreign solidarity volunteer within the world of human rights and social movements in Colombia is wrought with constant angst over one's positionality and role in relation to the struggle. Returning to Cali in the role of researcher, tasked with leading on the systematisation of the organisation's cherished pedagogical process, was a challenge which I wrestled with throughout the entire research process. Having always been *compañero Patrick*, how could I get my comrades to take me seriously as a researcher? Did I need them to see me as a researcher, or as an activist, or both? Did it even matter?

As an environment with a prolific intellectual production process, Nomadesc as an organisation was very conscious of the value and importance of its pedagogical work, and were very protective of it. They had turned down approaches in the past by academics keen to carry out similar work documenting the history of the pedagogical process. From soon after my arrival and throughout the process, I perceived doubts and reservations (real or imagined) in leading Nomadesc members about my ability and suitedness to carry out the systematisation. Whilst this could be unsettling at times, my reflection upon such thoughts was that ultimately such doubts were not problematic for the research process because within the systematisation of experiences methodology, my role was as just another member of the team, and I regularly insisted upon the collective, democratic nature of the process. Indeed, it would have been strange if an organisation with such a strong, independent intellectual production process did not have reservations about entrusting an inexperienced Western activist researcher to do justice to their learning and knowledge production processes.

Hence, in relation to Nomadesc I did not feel myself to be in a position of power as a white Western male. However, privilege and power often function in subtle ways, and I had to constantly question myself and my role and be aware of my own identity and position of privilege. It is important to differentiate between

my relationship with Nomadesc, and my relationship to the activists and social movements of the UIP, which is complex and varied. For the communities, I am somebody who arrives with Nomadesc and leaves with Nomadesc, often with a delegation of foreigners who are funding projects or have the power to fund projects. Here, my relationship is certainly more complex than the 'one of us' activist which our light-hearted interaction would suggest (and that I would like to be!). During workshops I was careful not to impose myself upon proceedings, and sought instead to encourage and facilitate the meaningful participation of all participants.

Whilst Nomadesc and the UIP have created a horizontal, democratic approach, the relationship between Nomadesc as an (albeit radical) NGO and the diverse social movements which they work with are unavoidably imbued with power differentials, tensions and potential contradictions, as with any social configuration. Despite the fact that Nomadesc's organisational philosophy and pedagogical methodology are based upon eradicating hierarchies, empowering participants and equally valuing all forms of knowledge, these processes are taking place within a society whose dominant values they run counter to. It would have been possible to devote an entire doctoral thesis to the micro-politics and dynamics of Nomadesc as an organisation and the social movements of the UIP, however it is clear from my research framework that this was not part of the focus, nor part of what Nomadesc was interested in engaging with as an organisation. Within our research process we sought to create a reflective, safe, constructive and trust-based environment in which all participants felt that their contributions were equally valid and valued.

One issue which I struggled with was combining the role of 'activist researcher' with the ongoing work required for the systematisation of experiences. As the only foreign member of the team, I was often expected to accompany particular activities and trips and perform certain functions. In the early stages, I welcomed these responsibilities as I sought to fully immerse myself in the organisation. As time went on I came to appreciate the hard work involved in academic labour and the need to carve out sufficient time to do justice to my academic labour whilst maintaining my activist responsibilities. Yet as the research process advanced and required more time and space, this became a source of tension as at times I had to withdraw from some activities in order to comply with responsibilities in the research process.

Safety and ethical considerations

Whilst I have set out elsewhere my expanded conception of research ethics, rooted in solidarity and reciprocity, it would of course be remiss not to consider the particularly complex ethical challenges posed

by the research context, which has been sufficiently described elsewhere. Aside from high levels of general social violence and petty crime, the country has a long history of violence and repression against the civilian population, perpetrated by the state forces and their paramilitary allies. Members of the Nomadesc team and activists within the social movements they work with have received regular death threats and been the subject of attacks, trumped up judicial charges, and even murders. Their communications and installations are strongly suspected to be under regular surveillance by state intelligence services. This means that it is not an exaggeration to say that my actions in the field had the potential to endanger my life and the lives of those around me. Before beginning my fieldwork, I gained ethical approval through the University of Sussex ethical review process. Once in the field, I was in regular contact with my supervisors in order to receive advice on ethical issues as they arose.

Throughout the research process, the safety of participants and members of the Nomadesc team was my utmost concern. The leaders are vastly experienced in operating in such a context, and the organisation itself has a huge amount of institutional experience. The organisation has its own security protocol in terms of internal and external communications (in particular, always assuming that communications are being intercepted and managing information accordingly); and in terms of logistics and facilities management. I followed the procedures adopted by the organisation. When visiting territories in rural and urban areas, Nomadesc work on the basis that the local community - which in many cases has lived in the context of the armed conflict for decades- is the most trustworthy and up to date source of information about the situation. Given the unpredictability of conflict-affected contexts such as Colombia, I followed the recommendation of several authors about adopting a flexible approach to methodology (Kovats-Bernat, 2002; Belousov et al, 2007; Goldsmith, 2003).

The Colombian context presented particularly complex ethical issues related to data management. With regards to ethics and data security, Bernats-Kovat (2002) recommends always working on the basis that one's work may fall into the hands of thirds parties (security services in particular) at any point. In Colombia, we operated on this principle for the data collection process. This meant not only anonymising sensitive information where necessary, but also judging when information was too sensitive to be recorded at all. This often required consultation with Nomadesc. No personal or identifying information was be disclosed to anyone, other than my research supervisors where pertinent. All findings which are published or shared with others are fully anonymised. Whilst adopting this careful approach, I also agree with Kovats-Bernat's who proposes that, because it is impossible for the researcher to anticipate every single possible danger which may arise from participation in the research in a conflict area, then the

relationship should be one of 'mutual responsibility' (ibid). Within the process, I always sought to inform participants as fully as possible of the nature of the research and the intentions for the knowledge produced. My default mode of gaining consent was verbal- through a full explanation of the research project, its objectives, implications, and expectations for participants and the researcher. Producing forms and asking people to sign can often provoke suspicion and unease amongst participants, particularly in communities which are not accustomed to dealing in written correspondence (Bourgois, 1990).

Another ethical aspect to consider in the writing up phase was the question of what should and shouldn't be included within our documents which would go on to be published: were there things which came up in the research process which our committed scholarship required us to keep quiet about? From the very beginning of the research process, there was a consensus amongst everyone involved that there would inevitably be some things which for security reasons must remain internal. We were told by Nomadesc team members of cases in Colombia where multinational corporations intending to obtain licenses within community territories for large scale resource extraction projects would contract academic researchers to carry out ethnographic research on the local community, which would then be used to inform the corporations' strategies for gaining access to the resources. We therefore decided that we would engage in ongoing reflection and evaluation within the research team of what could be shared, and what should necessarily remain internal.

In conclusion, this chapter has laid out a theoretical framework and combined methodological approach which was tailored for the study of social movements. I have also presented an in-depth reflective discussion upon the research journey, which nonetheless fails in the impossible task of capturing the intensity of the experience. I must confess to being somewhat of a convert to the systematisation of experiences methodology and believe that it has much to offer critical social scientists, particularly for the study of social movements. For this research process, the combination of systematisation of experiences with ethnographic methods proved effective, and both approaches contributed rich data which nourished the analytical process.

The following three data chapters are rooted entirely in data which emerged from the research process described in this chapter. In line with the decolonial epistemological approach outlined above, these chapters will use minimal reference to theoretical literature, and instead allow analytical themes to emerge from the data itself. In this way I seek a process which genuinely 'listens to the South', instead of imposing theoretical frames of discussion. The next chapter traces the history of the pedagogical process in relation to the shifting contextual dynamics of the southwest region.

SECTION TWO

Chapter 4: Sketching a history of the pedagogical process

This chapter traces the history of Nomadesc's pedagogical strategy, which began in 1999 and today is manifested as the *Intercultural University of the Peoples* (Universidad Intercultural de los Pueblos). The UIP is a social movement-based and led popular university which brings together 37 diverse movements and grassroots social organisations, and challenges Western notions of the university. The chapter seeks to lay the basis for the following two analysis chapters in this section. It does so by providing an account of the historical evolution of the various phases of the pedagogical process. In doing so I follow the shifting structure, praxis and thematic focus of the pedagogical process. Throughout the chapter I demonstrate the relationship between the pedagogical process and the shifting dynamics and conjunctures of social movements and their struggles. In line with the systematisation of experiences methodology and the ethos of my research, throughout the chapters in this section. I seek to foreground as much as possible the voices of the activists who have been part of the pedagogical process

I divide the chapter into two chronologically distinct periods. The first, from 1998 to 2010, covers the genesis of the pedagogical process and the setting up of a human rights diploma course in response to the region's human rights crisis. The second period, from 2010-2017, covers the period of transition from the diploma programme to the establishment of the UIP. I document a crucial paradigm shift in the epistemological underpinnings of the pedagogical praxis which occurred in response to the shifting social and political context.

4.1 An intercultural pedagogical response to crisis: 1998-2010

Origins and Antecedents: pre-1998

Nomadesc was founded as an organisation towards the end of the 1990s, by a group of highly committed human rights activists. The group had begun their activism together during their time at university. Having been tutored by the famous public interest lawyer, activist and university professor Eduardo Umaña Mendoza, all were heavily influenced by the principles of social humanism.⁵ Prior to founding Nomadesc

⁵ Social humanism can be understood as a praxis-based ideological framework which is endogenous to Colombia. It is discussed further in chapter 6. Umaña Mendoza was a prominent human rights lawyer, activist and professor who was a proponent of social humanism, and the son of Eduardo Umaña Luna, widely regarded as one of its founding fathers.

they had experience of accompanying social movement organising processes in conflict-affected areas of the northeast of Colombia (South of Cesar, Southern Bolivar, Magdalena Medio and Catatumbo regions), advising social movements including campesino communities, trade unions, and student organisations. In these regions they put into practice and developed their radical approach to defending human rights. This meant a holistic methodology for working with social movements which included education and training of leaders; capacity building; as well as socio-legal and advocacy work to defend human rights in a highly repressive and violent context.

Part of the learning and the knowledge dialogue which we had during our university years from the mid-80s and which continued on right through the 1990s, allowed us as a group of new leaders, from different disciplines, to come together to think deeply about the situation in the country, on the one hand, to look at the structural causes of the conflict and to look for alternatives, and that amongst these alternatives there was always a holistic approach to the defence of human rights, that is to say we believe that education can't be detached from investigation, education and investigation can't be detached from the legal support and advice to communities and from actions to support them in demanding their rights, and all the rest of the work with communities...(Nomadesc founding member, interview, 2018)

Nomadesc is born...it was based on a concept of working in-depth with communities, on generating community research processes aimed at bringing about transformations, so that with the empowerment the communities could generate processes of mobilisation and social action which would be transformative, and that is what was developed at the end of the 1990s and early 2000s, in a context which was increasingly complex because it was a time of great violence. It was the way of putting into practice the human rights pedagogy which we had developed over many years. (ibid)

A region rife with violence and protest: 1998-2003

The history of Nomadesc in the southwest region of Colombian began in 1998. It was here that the organisation would develop and adapt its approach to the defence of human rights. This approach was overtly political: for Nomadesc, the triggers of violations of human rights are inevitably related to macro political and economic processes, and hence actions in defence of human rights should seek to produce structural transformations in response to these structural causes.

Towards the end of the 1990s, Valle del Cauca was a region characterised on the one hand by a vibrant, militant social movement and trade union movement spearheaded by the trade unions and the peasant movement, and on the other hand by the high levels of systematic violence being targeted against the movements, particularly with the arrival of paramilitary squadrons to the region in 1999.

The trade union movement in Valle del Cauca, between the 1970s and 1990s was militant, creative and unified in a class-based political approach (despite ideological diversity mainly between different revolutionary ideological strands, primarily of different political currents within Marxism). The unions of the region had led historic struggles and were in many ways the vanguard of the Colombian trade union movement having made important gains for workers in the regions' industries over previous decades (Bermudez Prado et al, 2020). The principle underlying driver of both the protest and the violence was the deep neoliberal economic restructuring from 1991 onwards, as a result of which this region (along with the country) experienced a wave of mass layoffs of workers, closures of companies and erosion of working conditions. An ongoing, systematic process of repression employed varied strategies including violence and harassment in order to weaken the organised labour movement and facilitate these neoliberal transformations (*Trade unionist involved during early years of pedagogical process, interview, 2018*).

In Cali, the struggle of Sintraemcali, the region's most powerful and militant union, against the privatisation of EMCALI, the municipal state-owned utilities company, spurred a broad, diverse civic movement in the city which included inter alia trade unions, urban and rural communities, and human rights organisations. At a time when trade unions and social movements found themselves under attack both physically and also in terms of the implementation of reforms at the expense of workers and communities, the Sintraemcali struggle served as a totem around which a strong, solidarity-based civic movement coalesced in order to struggle against privatisation around the city but also to confront the violence that activists were facing.

The region witnessed a dramatic upsurge in human rights violations with the arrival of the Bloque Calima paramilitary structure, part of the national paramilitary movement the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia - AUC), who announced their presence with the massacre of peasant community members in La Moralia on 31 July 1999. Dozens more massacres by AUC forces followed against communities in the region. The repression was multi-faceted, and strategies were coordinated between the state and paramilitaries: any kind of political organising or collective activity became very dangerous for activists.

Nomadesc arrived in the southwest region initially in order to document the violations of civil and political rights that were taking place against the Sintraemcali union, which had been one of the main targets of repression in the region. But they were met with the panorama of widespread, systematic human rights violations taking place across the region:

We had more or less 30 cases of peasants who had been victims of massacres in the centre of Valle, and I remember in particular the case of one peasant who was killed and the family weren't allowed to take his body, so they had to put him on a horse, tie him to the horse, and the horse arrived [to the town] with the body...I was affected by all of the cases [of massacres and murders in the region]- Sintramecali, Trujillo, Buenaventura, also by the struggles... and I was struck that [Sintraemcali] wanted to investigate the crimes that were happening, but to do something different, to work on identifying the structural causes, and I found that exactly the same thing was happening here as I had found ...in Magdalena Medio region: there were multinational [economic] interests and part of the pedagogical exercise, which we debated a lot, was about what was behind all of the violence, why the massacres? Why the disappearances? And I think that has been the route which we have taken for the past twenty years (Nomadesc founding member and currently a leading member of the organisation, interview, 2018)

Nomadesc's arrival to Cali coincided with the coalescing of a network of highly committed activists and professionals from different movements and institutions in the city who recognised the danger posed by the arrival of the paramilitaries to the region. The group came together to develop a region-wide collaborative human rights network and human rights defence strategies, in order to respond to the crisis and support activists in the region:

Every time I talk about it sounds like a 'click', we came together from different sectors and our different spaces, trying to do something to respond to the situation, to try and confront that moment of anguish and the feeling that we had no way out, and when we came together we could see other possibilities, and with the *compañeros* we concluded, with the actions of each of us in our different sectors- in the university, in the political prisoners work, in my opinion that was a key moment and really important, because we were in a situation of permanent persecution of social leaders and communities.... (Participant in territorial workshop Cali, 2018)

The response: a pedagogical strategy begins

Nomadesc's arrival played an important role in the coalescing between diverse sectors of the movement around the Sintremcali struggle, as a connecting node which helped to forge unity through its human rights work. Nomadesc worked with Sintraemcali to develop a strategy to prevent human rights violations and strengthen the union's struggle against the privatisation of Cali's public services company, Emcali. This initiative would lead Nomadesc to set up and run the human rights department within Sintraemcali (between 2000 and 2006), developing the organisation's human rights strategy and linking it to the union's broader struggle against privatisation. In the process, what was ostensibly a defensive strategy to protect the lives of the union's activists and members, became an '*offensive action which allowed the union to mobilise human rights mechanisms to weaken Colombian government policy*' (Novelli, 2004, p181). The human rights department monitored human rights violations affecting the union, but also across the city

and increasingly across the southwest region relating to other organisations and movements. In line with Nomadesc's overriding philosophy, activist education was a central element of this broader work strategy, and from the beginning became an important part of the coordinated human rights work with trade unions and other social organisations.

Initially, the pedagogical aspect of the strategy was aimed at trade unions in the region and some organisations involved in the civic movement which had coalesced around the struggle against the privatisation of EMCALI. It took the format of a series of bespoke workshops on human rights, labour rights and leadership. The human rights workshops created a pedagogical space which was a physical manifestation of the growing human rights network which had emerged in the region. The initiative facilitated interaction and dialogue between the trade unions and other members of this civic movement, in which they were able to discuss and reflect upon the realities which they were facing in each of their struggles:

I think the spark was ignited, and the pedagogical [initiative] was a way of being connected... (Participant in territorial workshop Cali, 2018)

They were able to do this within the framework of a human rights focus, which aimed to provide them with basic skills and knowledge to allow activists to confront the human rights crisis being experienced throughout the regions in their territories. This included learning self-protection mechanisms and strategies, recording and reporting human rights violations. This pedagogical human rights work would have a lasting impact and legacy for the trade unions involved, some of which went on to create their own organised, strategic approaches to human rights defence:

We can say that Nomadesc was the pioneer of the human rights departments in Sintraemcali, in Sintraunicol, in the CUT Valle (trade union central), because we arrived and began a human rights education process... (Nomadesc founding member and currently a leading member of the organisation, interview, 2018).

Not only did Nomadesc identify with the political struggles of the communities and social movements with which they work, but from the beginning they saw it as part of their role to strengthen and support those struggles. The approach was also based on the belief that historically, collective social action was the most effective tool upon which communities and social movements could rely in their struggles for rights:

...a constant in the history of Colombia and in the history of social movements, is that no right has been won without mobilisation: all of the rights that communities have, and this is central to our pedagogy, have been a product of social struggle, of protests, of peaceful occupations of state institutions, of marches on the roads... (ibid).

Nomadesc draws upon a broad spectrum of the various ‘generations’ of human rights, including the various covenants on civil and political rights; as well as the economic, social and cultural rights framework, which they often leverage in their work with communities. Yet they also go beyond these broadly recognised frameworks to take as a political reference point the collective rights contained in the 1976 Algiers Charter on the Rights of Peoples.

Transition: From workshops to diplomas

Nomadesc and the organisations involved in the workshops soon realised that the human rights situation in southwest Colombia at the turn of the century demanded a broader, more coordinated response across the region. Paramilitary violence was being experienced in urban and rural territories, with devastating effects for social movement organising.

We met with reality in the different parts of the region, and these realities included the massacres which were happening [in the communities along] the Cabal Pombo road [between the cities of Cali and Buenaventura], that was where Nomadesc comes into contact with that reality and we began to work hand in hand with some of the organisations that at the time were maybe some of the strongest in organisational terms, but that despite being strong were very vulnerable, some of the most vulnerable in the region, on the one hand there was the reality of the rural communities, in particular the Afro-descendent communities, which were being affected by the armed conflict in their territories, and on the other hand the threat to the trade unions which were being gradually exterminated. (Nomadesc founding member and currently a leading member of the organisation, interview, 2018)

The worsening human rights situation in the region led Nomadesc and Sintraemcali to develop a broader organising initiative along with other leading trade unions and organisations, and a major component of this was the Prohibido Olvidar campaign (Forbidden to Forget). This initiative brought together around 30 different social movements and organisations in a wide-ranging campaign against privatisation, corruption and the criminalisation of social protest.

there were a range of different political, pedagogical and legal tools which came together, and one really important aspect was that it allowed us to be really creative in order to defend lives, and the Prohibido Olvidar campaign was an action of revindication and of historical memory of the murdered and exiled leaders...with a very strong element of international solidarity, which allowed us a certain amount of protection for the most vulnerable and threatened activists...there were several other components [of the campaign], there was communication, advocacy work, diplomatic and political action, both with international human rights organisation and developing solidarity links with trade unions in England, Canada and Spain, and central to all of this was the development of a pedagogical strategy (Nomadesc founding member and currently a leading member of the organisation, interview, 2018)

The Prohibido Olvidar campaign, and Nomadesc's expanding work with social movements and communities across the region, generated discussions about the need to expand the pedagogical strategy in order to include a broader array of trade unions and social movements, including peasant communities from rural areas. Working with prominent social movements and trade unions in the region, Nomadesc developed an expanded, more structured pedagogical strategy rooted in principles of solidarity, criticality, and knowledge dialogue between diverse social movements. It took the format of a diploma course in 'Human rights research and pedagogy', which would run between 2001 and 2010. The transition to diploma programme represented the first major qualitative leap for the pedagogical process.

The first cohort of the programme in 2001-2002 was a self-funded pedagogical initiative sustained by solidarity and collaboration with sister organisations and movements, embedded within the network of relationships which was emerging and being consolidated between individuals, collectives and movements in the region:

the first diplomas were done with the support of trade unions, without any international financial support: each trade union gave a small amount of money to pay for the logistics and each trade union sponsored two or three people from a community, from rural peasant communities, from black communities, displaced communities, urban communities, so at the end of 2000 and start of 2001 we had our first intercultural team for the diploma. (Nomadesc founding member and currently a leading member of the organisation, interview, 2018)

The intercultural nature of the diploma was novel for the social movements of the region. This entailed more than simply bringing these sectors together: it was a deliberate attempt to foster collaboration and solidarity between the sectors, and to generate networks of social action and human rights defence:

Before [the diploma] it wasn't even on our agenda the idea of coming together as indigenous, Afro-Colombians, trade unionists, students, to do something on an ongoing basis...we met each other for specific things like May Day or for a strike or mobilisation or whatever...but that was a big advance for us as social movement educators, and we have preserved that principle since the beginning, which was to bring together different sectors which all had their own agendas...(participant in territorial workshop, Cali, 2018).

Aside from seeking to provide knowledge of basic tools and strategies for the defence of human rights, from the beginning there was also a deeply political intentionality in the diploma:

I think that people needed a space to come together, because of the political moment, so [the diploma] was the space where we saw each other and it sounds strange but where we could be inspired, by that I mean to be able to think bigger, to think that we have a vision of transformation and a different country, because the situation of

violence had broken something so that was important...(Activist involved in early years of the diploma programme working as part of the Nomadesc team, interview, 2018)

...there were needs, but there were also expectations, there were also dreams, there was also the search for the people to build and politically organise, so there was a confluence of different factors and you couldn't say it was just about strengthening the defence of EMCALI, that was part of it but it was also about getting people organised, and the construction of a pedagogical model which was different to what was being done by others at the time, linking together different social movements...(Trade unionist involved during early years of pedagogical process, interview, 2018).

The fact that the diploma programme was intricately connected to Nomadesc's broader human rights work with social movements in the region, and hence was closely linked to the struggles and realities of those movements, ensured that the pedagogical content was designed in order to be relevant and of use to the movements involved and the violent conjuncture:

The difference with a political education process run by an organisation like Nomadesc is that there is an intentionality and an ongoing reading of reality, as well as a vision of the country, and it is so linked into the social movement, all of these components is what gives different results. If you take the education and investigation and put them in a different context, you won't get the same results. (Activist involved in early years of the diploma programme working as part of the Nomadesc team, interview, 2018)

Expanding the scope of the diploma programme: 2003 - 2006

As the paramilitary violence expanded across the urban and rural territories of the region, so too did Nomadesc increase the geographical and demographic scope of its human rights work in accompanying social movements and communities. The nature of this work on the frontline of the region's human rights crisis brought home the stark reality of what was going on beyond the trade unions' urban settings, in rural peasant, indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities. The human rights crisis, along with the growing collaboration with social movements and trade unions across the region in an ad hoc network of human rights activism, led Nomadesc and the movements involved to decide to expand and further diversify the diploma programme.

In 2003 the diploma was diversified because there was a political discussion that it wasn't just about supporting the trade union movement which was being attacked, but that all of the sectors were being attacked, so it was about trying to strengthen the broader social movement, so the focus was no longer trade unions but all sectors of the social movements... (current leading Nomadesc members, and diploma student during early years, interview, 2018).

The expansion of the pedagogical process to include more social movements from both rural and urban territories across the region also represented a geographical expansion, as more territories were linked

into the initiative and the broader network in which it nestled. This geographical expansion and diversification represented a second qualitative leap in the pedagogical process.

Despite some scepticism over the political implications of receiving international funding, a partnership was formed with the left-wing British NGO War on Want to seek funding from institutional donors, which lasted until 2006. The funding facilitated the large expansion in the numerical and territorial scope of the pedagogical initiative, whilst the partnership with War on Want allowed Nomadesc to retain autonomy over the form and content of the work. This type of partnership with radical NGOs from the Global North that operate on principles of solidarity rather than charity has remained a feature of the process from 2003 until the present day. International funding for the project also meant being able to cover the costs of transport, accommodation and food for all participants, which was more onerous with the increased participation of rural community activists (*Araujo, 2015*).

The expansion meant that Nomadesc collaborated with allied organisations and movements in 4 different areas of the region: the Black Communities Process (Proceso de Comunidades Negras- Palenque el Congal) in Buenaventura, coastal Pacific region of Valle del Cauca department; the trade union of the SENA technical college of Tulua, in the mountainous area of centre of Valle department; ASOINCA trade union with support from the National Trade Union Institute (INS) in Popayan, Cauca department, and the Lanzas and Letras activists collective and the Observatorio Sur human rights organisation in Neiva, in Huila department. These alliances facilitated the joint coordination of the diploma course between Nomadesc and the local partners (Nomadesc alone coordinated the implementation of the diploma courses which ran in Cali). Each area would adapt the emphasis of the diploma according to the demographic of the participating movements and the particularities of the context. Between 2003 and 2011, 14 cohorts of the diploma programme ran across the five different zones (see table 1 below). Between 2001 and 2011, 547 social movement leaders across the southwest region participated in the diploma (*Araujo, 2015, p83*). Courses would run at weekends, usually two full-day workshops every two weeks, with some variations depending upon the particularities of the different zones and also the unpredictability of the conjunctures of social movements and human rights in southwest Colombia.

Year	Zone	No. graduates	Women	Men
2003	Cali	40	18	22
2003	Buenaventura	38	16	22
2004	Centre of Valle	45	18	27
2004	Popayan	40	19	21

2005	Cali	38	20	18
2005	Buenaventura	36	14	22
2005	Popayan	45	25	20
2005	Centre of Valle	38	10	28
2005	Neiva, Huila	45	25	20
2006	Cali	35	18	17
2006	Buenaventura	36	22	14
2007	Cali	31	15	16
2009	Cali	38	20	16
2010	Neiva, Huila	42	28	18
Total		547	268	281

Figure 4.1: Numbers of diploma graduates for each cohort. Source: Araujo, 2015, p83

Understanding the rationale behind the diploma programme

It is important to delve a little deeper in order to understand the rationale behind the diploma course, particularly during this period in around 2003 when it was expanded and became more structured. In the original project proposal document for the 2003 diploma expansion, the overall objectives of the pedagogical initiative are described as such:

To strengthen the organising processes [of social movements] developing a policy of qualification and education in human rights and developing leaders with the capacity to be human rights defenders, to investigate the structural causes of human rights violations, in order to be able to multiply the learning within their own organisations; and to be able to interact with other social movements as well as state institutions... (Nomadesc (archival document) 2002: p14)

The excerpt demonstrates the human rights-centric focus of the early years, and the express purpose of raising the human rights defending capacity of social movements which found themselves in a moment of crisis, providing skills and knowledge for example around basic legal mechanisms; and at the same time providing participants with increased investigative and analytical capacity to identify the structural causes of human rights violations. For rural communities, this increased human rights capacity was explicitly aimed at supporting their struggles against being displaced from their territories, in a context where mass forced displacement was occurring as a result of the violence. Yet the document also outlines the broader political objectives of the process, which relate to strengthening the social movements in their struggles, and by extension strengthening the broader movement:

Social movements must build and articulate a national educating and organising strategy with human rights work teams in every organisation. This organising process is designed to raise the capacity of the trade union and social movement for the coming period, which we know is full of urgent challenges with regards to human rights. At the same time, the construction of a network of social movements, NGOs and other organisations implies a political initiative with an undeniable impact upon the agenda of those involved in the network as well as the broader popular movement. It is imperative to strengthen the human rights education work not only for prevention of human rights violations but also for the strengthening of social movements. (ibid, p3)

This deeply political statement demonstrates the intentionality of weaving together a political network on the basis of defending human rights, but at the same time in the aim at seeking points of convergence between the agendas of social movements in the region. It demonstrates the emancipatory, transformative character and intentions of bringing together such diverse social movements engaged in social struggles in territories across the southwest region:

It was a political education process within the context of a broader struggle for social transformation and articulated with social movements...what kind of society do we want? There was a clear intentionality here, and the process managed to provide tools for the struggle for social transformation- two elements which are key in the ideological dispute - education and investigation, and later they also included communication too... (Activist involved in early years of the diploma programme working as part of the Nomadesc team, interview, 2018)

The embeddedness of Nomadesc's human rights work allowed the organisation to develop a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of the dynamics of violence and capitalist development across the region, in other words to be able to join the dots between the social movement struggles in the region:

we were able to reconstruct what was happening and look at what had happened with paramilitarism, and see that it wasn't disconnected from the economic interests and projects, and that Plan Colombia was never disconnected, nor were the murders of activists, or the building of the road to Buenaventura, we were able to show how all of the development projects which capital had planned coincided on the map with the areas where the paramilitaries had committed their violence, we couldn't let that go... (current leading Nomadesc member, and diploma student during early years, interview, 2018).

From the beginning, the diploma was understood as a collective pedagogical construction between Nomadesc and the movements involved, as demonstrated by the collaborative approach to coordination and implementation. Participants were recognised in their capacity as political actors, as activists who belonged to social movements engaged in social struggle:

the participants are also participants in the construction of the model, not passive subjects who are going to receive knowledge - those who arrived were active subjects... (Trade unionist involved during early years of pedagogical process, interview, 2018).

Something which interviewees emphasised was the importance of the role the diploma played in simply providing the opportunity to come together with activists from other organisations and sectors who were involved in their own struggles but were also being targeted by paramilitaries:

It was the way to be able to meet again, because the armed conflict was so intense that a meeting of 2 or more people was seen as subversive, and a meeting of more than that could be threatened or even attacked, many massacres were committed when people were holding meetings... (Nomadesc founding member and currently a leading member of the organisation, interview, 2018)

Each region had its own specificity in terms of the participation, in Centre of Valle the majority were peasants and some trade unionists, it was literally a question of those that were left, those that hadn't been killed or displaced, so the simple fact that they were here meeting together, having been able to meet, was an important gain at that time. That was a really important aspect of the diploma at that time, just being able to bring people together, because the context was so difficult, that's why it was new, and it was so necessary at that moment. We could say the same in Buenaventura for the Afro-Colombian processes, in Popayan for the indigenous and peasant processes, or in Cali with more trade union and urban processes. (Activist involved in early years of the diploma programme working as part of the Nomadesc team, interview, 2018)

The three pillars of education, participatory action research and social action run throughout Nomadesc's human rights work, and are inseparable from other aspects of Nomadesc's holistic approach. Frequently communities, movements and struggles which Nomadesc accompanied would be invited to send representatives to participate in the diploma programme - whether trade unions, students' collectives, rural indigenous, Afro-Colombian or peasant communities, or urban communities. That is, an important dimension of Nomadesc's work with social movements to defend their human rights and strengthen their struggles was the pedagogical process. People arrived to the pedagogical process by virtue of their participation in social struggle in the region, not as individuals but as representatives of social movements. Throughout the history of the pedagogical process, in its different phases and guises, this has been a defining feature of the political character of the process.

I arrived to Nomadesc in 2004 after an investigation process that... [Nomadesc] had been doing about the impacts of the Salvajina [hydroelectric dam in north-west Cauca department], and the investigation ended up [generating] an organising process...at that time we had the strike of the Emcali workers...I remember that as a human rights organisation Nomadesc supported us, because at that moment the paramilitaries had arrived to our territory, and Nomadesc took us to Cali [to the diploma]. (Rural Afro-

Colombian community leader, graduate of diploma programme during the early years, interview, 2018)

Nomadesc's approach to socio-legal work, which involves taking forward strategic legal cases related to the collective rights claims of communities, provides a demonstration of this holistic approach. The organisation's attitude to legal action is that it is only feasible and worthwhile if it is linked to pedagogical and organisational action and mobilisation:

Today's meeting involved a discussion about whether or not Nomadesc should take on legal cases in relation to the families fighting against relocation by the Jarillon corporate infrastructure project. Without going into the ins and outs of the debate, what was interesting was that the discussion hinged not on the legal points of the case, but rather on the politics surrounding it, and particularly on the possibility of generating an effective organising process and campaign, and of how the legal case would relate to such a process. (Kane, ethnographic fieldnotes, 2018)

Shifting regional dynamics: 2006-2011

Through Nomadesc's work with social movements across the region they identified a shift which occurred at around the midpoint of the decade in the dynamics of the conflict and the *modus operandi* of the paramilitaries. Increasingly the territories being disputed and hence with greater vulnerability tended to be rural ethnic territories inhabited by indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities. These sectors were leading some of the most prominent social struggles during this period. At regional and national level, the trade unions had been weakened after being heavily targeted for violence and repression, as described above. As Nomadesc's work with black and indigenous communities increased, so too the centre of gravity of the diploma programme would gradually shift from the trade union agenda to encompass the widening participation and changing demographics. The mixture of diverse political struggles, cultural identities and epistemological paradigms would increasingly influence the thematic and pedagogical construction of the process.



Photo 4.1 Diploma course participants in Cali 2010 Credit: Nomadesc

4.2 The pedagogical praxis of the diploma programme

From the beginning, those leading the development of the pedagogical process were critical of traditional popular education models which they felt were not receptive to the particularities and diversity of social subjects which exists in a country like Colombia, and therefore tended to offer a homogenising (ideological) solution or model to the oppressed classes:

Rather than generating moulds, and that those moulds come as if like a recipe with the first step, second step, third step, for us what we saw was that the reality [in the region] required the opposite, which meant building the process hand in hand with the communities ...in which people felt they were the protagonists of the process, not others coming in and taking the lead. (Nomadesc founding member and currently a leading member of the organisation, interview, 2018)

During the period of the diploma programme (2001-2011), the pedagogical principles and experience with which Nomadesc had arrived to the region in the late 1990s were weaved and transformed through the experience and interaction with the social movements and conjunctures of the southwest region. The pedagogical and organisational approach required a high level of flexibility and dynamism in order to respond to the requirements, experiences and struggles of the social movements and communities, which in turn are dynamic and ever-changing:

Education, and especially alternative education, cannot be static, it has to be in movement and based on reality, and reality isn't static, it is constantly changing, and in the same sense the economic model and its impacts are not the same today as they

were in the 1990s, [the elites] are constantly updating and perfecting their strategies to be able to control and take over territories and resources (ibid)

Hence, the pedagogical-organisational strategy has constantly evolved over the years, in relation to a range of factors, including: the changing political, social and economic situation of the communities in the southwestern region and at the national level in particular through the implementation of a militarised neoliberal economic development model; the ebbs and flows of the struggles of social movements and mobilisations at regional and national level against this model and to maintain and expand alternative forms and ways of being and organising; and the learning that has taken place through praxis throughout the years of the strategy.

The praxis of the diploma programmes encouraged students to critically analyse their own realities in order to identify the structural causes of the human rights violations they faced. Beyond the diagnosis of the situation, the key was to develop collective strategies to transform that situation. This *intercultural knowledge dialogue* between different sectors is a central principle of the pedagogical strategy. The diploma programme created a deeply political educational space in which activists from indigenous movements, Afro-Colombian, peasant, student, trade unions and women interacted and shared their experiences of resistance and alternative forms of organising and seeing the world. The intercultural knowledge dialogue, and the related learning and knowledge processes, are analysed in chapter 6.

One objective was to increase unity and collaboration among varied sectors, increasing on the one hand the protection of human rights through the strengthening of networks in the territories of the region in order to reconstruct the social fabric broken by violence. At the same time, the process was intended to collectively strengthen social movements in their struggles by deepening the political consciousness of social movement militants and leaders. Instead of trying to amalgamate the struggles and create a uniform approach, the strategy recognised diversity as a richness. Underlying this approach is the acknowledgement that whilst all sectors are being affected by the same neoliberal economic model and the same repressive apparatus, they are affected in different ways, they have different histories, different cultures, different approaches to their struggles, and different epistemologies. Hence, rather than seek to build a homogenous vanguard movement, members of Nomadesc frequently talk of seeking ‘strategic and thematic unity’ between social movements (Kane, ethnographic fieldnotes, 2018).

The popular education principle of ‘*aprender haciendo*’, or learn through doing, has been central to Nomadesc’s pedagogical philosophy. This means that the praxis is also imbued with the belief that learning is enhanced through embodied processes and experiences. Since the beginning, the pedagogical

process has had a strong territorial-experiential dimension which has sought to harness social movement territories and struggles as sights of learning. Part of the pedagogical praxis has included visiting active struggles and mobilisations which occur in the region, and using these as thematic, live learning experiences exchange. Invariably, when one of the organisations or movements of the UIP is involved in some kind of mobilisation, campaign or activity then this will be shared, debated and analysed as a thematic topic. For example, during the sugar cane cutters strike of 2008, a bus was hired to take students to the picket lines where they were able to dialogue with the striking workers, exchange experiences, and learn about trade union issues, the right to strike, the causes of the strike and the demands of the workers, as well as broader lessons about the realities of neoliberalism and who it benefits.

Thematic flexibility: understanding the dynamic content of the diploma programme

The sensitivity to the realities of communities which has characterised the pedagogical process also meant a dynamic approach to content and thematic focuses over the years. The process has always had a flexible overall curricular structure. During the diploma years, the curriculum was arranged into four different blocks which structured the thematic content. The conceptual block was aimed at providing theoretical-conceptual elements, for example around understanding and analysing the democratic system; or the various generations of human rights. The contextual block engaged in an analysis of the local economic, political and social context in order to identify structural causes of human rights violations. The procedural block was tied to action, and aimed at providing participants with human rights skills and knowledge which they could directly apply to their own activism and the struggles of their movements. Key to this axis, in a country where state institutions are often ineffective and corrupt, was the fact that the programme didn't just provide legal mechanisms for human rights defence but also 'alternative mechanisms' which related to collective, direct actions which could be taken in defence of human rights. Finally, a research block, in which participants would develop a participatory action research assignment (the research element of the process is discussed further below). Within this overall structure, the thematic content would be constantly updated, rearranged or changed depending upon the specificities of the movements, the territory in which the diploma was running, and the broader local, regional and national contexts:

[when I started to work at Nomadesc in 2005] I came to better understand the methodology and I realised that the pedagogical strategy wasn't established like we are used to in the university where at the beginning they would tell you the course is going to include x, y and z and they stay more or less the same; here I realised that there were a few themes/subjects which were permanent, but others were changed according to the political situation in the country, the conjunctures... for example I remember when I was a student on the diploma there was a lot of discussion about the impact of Plan

Colombia which was in its first phase of implementation, and it was the first term of President Uribe, and obviously there were a lot of massacres at the time...(current leading Nomadesc member, and diploma student during early years, interview, 2018).

According to one facilitator, during the earlier years of the process, the pedagogical approach was less developed, and the focus was more on the political accompaniment aspect, with the pedagogical process a kind of appendage to the broader political work. As the diploma course developed and the experience and learning accumulated, so the pedagogical focus would be expanded and deepened:

[in the early years] we did it more as a question of political accompaniment, I think that those pedagogical reflections have developed over time, I think at that time [in the early years] we didn't really sit down and have debates about the pedagogical focus, I think really there were political intentions that were being driven through education space....more in the logic of political activism and the defence of the public. (Activist involved in early years of the diploma programme working as part of the Nomadesc team, interview, 2018)

The dynamic, flexible approach to the methodology was reflected in regional variations in thematic focuses of the diploma programme, depending upon the sectoral identities of the organisations and movements participating, and the identified needs and strategic priorities. In Cali, where in total five cohorts of the diploma course were run (2003, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009) during the early years of the diploma, the participation of trade unions was highest, with other urban sectors including students, community activists and human rights or church groups also participating. As the participation of indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities from North-West Cauca increased, they also participated in the Cali programmes (Araujo, 2015: p36).

In Buenaventura, where diploma courses ran in 2003, 2005, and 2006, the local partner movement, the Black Communities Process (Procesos de Comunidades Negras) was at the forefront of the black movement in the region, and at the time was particularly involved in organising work in the rural Afro-Colombian river communities of the Pacific jungle in the area, and hence these communities provided a strong proportion of the participating organisations, as well as Afro-Colombian urban activists from Buenaventura, and representatives of civic organisations including church groups. Because of the predominantly Afro-Colombian participation, and the ongoing struggle for territory (and in particular against displacement), the diploma was given an additional focus of the collective ethnic rights of Afro-Colombian communities, as well as an emphasis on Afro-Colombian history, culture and cosmovisions in order to *'strengthen the identity, the sense of belonging to the territory, as mechanisms for the defence and protection of the territory and the community'* (Araujo, 2015, p40).

Nomadesc often did the facilitation, the teachers were really good quality, and we decided the themes, methodology and content together, and often PCN facilitated sessions for example around the Law 70 (of collective ethnic-territorial rights of Afro-Colombian communities) which is our strong point, collective rights, we were the ones who led those sessions always accompanied by Nomadesc, it was all very collegiate. (Activist of the Black Communities Process, former student of diploma programme during early years, current facilitator for UIP, interview, 2018)

In Tulua, Centre of Valle, where two cohorts of the diploma course were run, in the 2004 cohort the highest participation was that of peasants and trade unionists, whilst in the second cohort there was an increase in participation of community activists (Araujo, 2011). The courses in Tulua were notable for the high numbers of participants, despite or perhaps because of the levels of violence being faced at the time:

I arrived to the classroom in Tulua and I saw so many people...each region had their own specificity in terms of participation, for example in centre of Valle the majority were peasants, because it's a peasant area, and then some trade unionists. (Activist involved in early years of the diploma programme working as part of the Nomadesc team, interview, 2018)

The situation in Tulua and the surrounding area was so dangerous during this period that the subject of human rights had to be dealt with in a discreet manner, and the pedagogical space of the diploma course in the local technical college provided an opportunity for activists from different sectors to come together in a way which was very difficult and dangerous at the time:

I remember that X said to me, 'we've had to leave aside the human rights discourse, but we still put it into practice, its just that we use a different discourse, like food sovereignty...we are still resisting just like we always have, defending our territory... but we have to use other strategies', and these are forms of resistance: the diploma was the possibility to meet with activists from loads of other processes, but in a really heated moment (Activist involved in early years of the diploma programme working as part of the Nomadesc team, interview, 2018)

In Popayan, Cauca, where two cohorts were held (2004 and 2005), the local partner was the teaching union ASOINCA, and the majority of the participants were teachers and peasants. Given the high number of teachers, the diplomas in Popayan were given an additional focus on popular education methodologies, to support them in their work as educators and in their activism, aimed at generating more critical consciousness through their work (Araujo, 2015).

In Neiva, Huila, where two cohorts of the diploma were run (2005, 2010), the local partner was the Lanzas y Letras activist collective, who gave the diploma an additional gender-oriented focus. The diplomas in Huila were notable for the high level of participation of women, and different women's collectives, as well

as urban community activists, peasant and indigenous representatives. Today, this local women's movement in Huila is a key component of the women's section of the national social movement alliance, the People's Congress.

Given the predominance of trade unions in the early phase of the process, the thematic content of the diploma (beyond the basic human rights skills and knowledge) during the first year or so was more heavily influenced by issues such as privatisation and the impact of the neoliberal reforms upon workers and organised labour. Other important thematic focusses included the impacts of Plan Colombia; understanding the origin and nature of the state and paramilitarism in Colombia; the role of multinational companies in Colombian history and the armed conflict, which would remain a constant theme throughout the history of the initiative; and the potential impacts of the Free Trade Agreement between Colombia and the US (Araujo, 2015). With the shifting demographics and changing regional and national contexts, new thematic focusses would emerge between 2007 and 2011, including a greater engagement with the extractivist model of economic development and the impacts of large scale natural resource extraction projects; women's rights; the rights of displaced people, and collective ethno-territorial rights of indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities (ibid).

A constant, cross-cutting element of the pedagogical praxis, from the beginning of the diploma programme to the current format of the UIP, has been the Participatory Action Research (PAR) pedagogical research methodology developed by Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda. In PAR, the research process is at the same time a pedagogical process which must be closely linked to social action:

[The idea was] the construction of knowledge in order to be able to mobilise around the problem that was being studied. (Activist involved in early years of the diploma programme working as part of the Nomadesc team, interview, 2018)

The principle of getting to "know reality in order to transform it", which underpins the Nomadesc pedagogical initiative, is closely identified with Fals Borda's methodological approach. The participatory action research (PAR) process is aimed at developing participants' political awareness, as they gain a deeper understanding of their own realities, but with a specific link to social action: to acting upon the reality being studied (Araujo, 2015). These research processes are coordinated with the participating social movements and hence are closely tied to the requirements of their struggles. Whilst influenced by Fals Borda's work, over the years Nomadesc has developed and honed its own interpretation of PAR within its pedagogical work based on its own experience of working with social movements and communities.

Another feature of the pedagogical approach since the beginning of the diploma programme has been the requirement that all participants design, organise and facilitate a 'replication' workshop in a movement, community or organisation. This aspect springs from the objective of ensuring that the knowledge and learning acquired by the participants permeates into the social movements to which they belong, and hence is as far as possible put to the benefit of the social movements. At the same time it is about deepening and consolidating the learning processes of the participants, not only in terms of the thematic learning but also through experiencing the territories of other social movements or organisations, and the practical experience of planning and facilitating a workshop. These workshops ensured a sense of accountability to the broader social movement on the part of the participants:

it isn't you that came to study as an individual, here you are a delegate on behalf of an organising process, so at the end you have to go and respond to your organisation, and that is where the replication workshops were important, because they were done in the movements so it brought the process into the organisations...and people knew that later on they had to take the knowledge back to their movement, and we would also mix it up so that people would do workshops with other organisations which weren't their own...and create an exchange of experiences through these replication workshops. (ibid)

During the years of the diploma programme, Nomadesc would organise annual events in Cali which would bring together social movements from across the region, including those which participated in the pedagogical process. These Weaving Resistance (*Tejiendo Resistencia*) events would often have around 150-200 representatives of social movements and organising processes from across the region, and were an opportunity to gain a panoramic snapshot of the conjunctures in the region's territories and the state of the varied social struggles of movements. They were also a way of linking the pedagogical process to Nomadesc's broader work with social movements in the region. They aimed to consolidating and expand regional-level cooperation and collaboration between movements.

The 'Tejiendo Resistencias' events seek to bring into dialogue the social movements of the southwest region in order to jointly reflect, analyse and debate the political conjunctures of the country, but from the basis of the reality lived by communities and the human rights situation. The conclusions of the event would then be put together in public declarations which manifest the sentiments and the realities which are ignored by the mainstream media, and left out of official reports. (Araujo, 2015, p89)

The term 'weaving' aptly captures the political intentionality of these intercultural gatherings, suggesting a coming together of the fabrics of different movements, struggles and cultures. It also alludes to a patient building process in which the whole becomes more than the sum of its parts, as a broader network is consolidated, yet without renouncing their own identity and uniqueness. Beyond the diploma course, over

the years Nomadesc has regularly designed and implemented bespoke pedagogical activities and programmes for the organisations and movements it works with. From 2008 onwards, the organisation began to develop a series of ongoing pedagogical initiatives with individual social movements, including strategies working directly with movements and communities in their territories. Such initiatives always emerged from and were part of a broader strategy of accompaniment and support from Nomadesc to the struggles in question. They included designing and implementing pedagogical processes aimed at supporting activists' learning processes and hence strengthening the struggles of the organisations, movements or communities by strengthening organising processes, raising consciousness and defending human rights. These would vary according to the particularities of the conjunctures at local level and the struggle in question.

4.3 Towards the Intercultural University of the Peoples: 2010-2018

The election victory in 2010 of President Juan Manuel Santos would bring about a change in the government's attitude towards social movements, from the hardline rhetoric of President Uribe to a more conciliatory, human rights-friendly discourse (whilst retaining and expanding much of Uribe's policy agenda). Santos opened peace talks with the FARC guerrilla movement in 2012. The government's shift in discourse, and the broader optimism generated across the country with the opening of peace talks, created a wave of action and debate across civil society including within social movements, about the social transformations which were required in order to end over half a century of war.

These developments formed the background for the largest and most recent qualitative leap in the history of the pedagogical process. In 2010, Nomadesc and social movements involved decided to transform the initiative by discontinuing the diploma programme in order to set up the UIP, a popular university run by and for social movements. For several years, they had discussed the idea of an alternative model of university.

The motivation for the UIP was the desire for a more comprehensive pedagogical process that could support social movements in the region by aiding the emergence of a new generation of leaders. By providing activists with skills and knowledge that could go beyond the human rights focus of the diploma, the UIP sought to further contribute to the struggles of social movements by providing tools for diagnosis and strategic planning; deepening the exchange and revindication of the alternative and ancestral knowledges held and produced in the social movements and their struggles; and forging stronger and deeper links among social movements in the region in an effort to foster collaboration on the basis of strategic and thematic unity:..when the diplomas finished, we already had a rough idea and an objective to create a much deeper and more developed education process, for example the diplomas lasted for 6 months, and we

were talking about the formation of these new leaders for three years...[the extended formation process] would support them to become authorities in their territories but obviously 'alternative' authorities, as well as to look profoundly into the effects that the economic model was having upon territories...when we began to design the strategic plan for the university, from the start we were thinking about what the programmes/modules could be, and it was about building on the experience of the diplomas, in order to think collectively between us about what the emphasis of the university programmes could be (Nomadesc founding member and currently a leading member of the organisation, interview, 2018)

[The objective is] to make a qualitative leap from the diplomas... towards an education which would continuously rescue and revindicate ancestral principles and traditions in defence of life and territory, and which allow a deepening of their and practice of human rights, the rights of peoples, economic social, cultural and environmental rights, and native law (Nomadesc (archival documents), 2014, p8)

This didn't mean the abandonment of human rights as a theme within the UIP, but rather a de-centring and shift of emphasis. The human rights focus of the early year of the pedagogical process had been a response to the context which has been set out in this chapter, and in particular the human rights crisis created by the arrival of paramilitary death squads to the region. The changing context in the region, driven by the optimism generated by the peace talks between the government and FARC guerrillas, provided the backdrop for this shift in focus of the pedagogical process, in the way that Nomadesc's praxis sought to strengthen the struggles of participating movements, in seeking to actively support, foment and inter-weave communities and social movements in the (re)production and expansion of alternative modes of living and organising. From the beginning, Nomadesc and the organisations and movements involved in the creation of the UIP were critical of the peace process between the Santos government and FARC guerrillas, because of the narrow scope of the agenda for negotiations, and limited opportunity for civil society participation (see chapter 2). Yet the context of the peace process and the flurry of activity and debates which it spurred within social movements had a large impact upon the early years of the UIP:

[the UIP] must develop a long-term pedagogical strategy which allows it to contribute to the permanence of the communities in their territories and the collective construction of an inclusive, transformative peace proposal which is able to overcome the failures of the bilateral and unilateral peace initiatives over the past two decades. That is to say, a peace proposal where the communities, social movements and peoples are the principles actors (ibid, p9)

Developing an idea: building the UIP

An extended process of collective conceptual development was undertaken between 2010 and 2014, in order to determine the feasibility and to give form and content to the initiative. The first cohort of the

university eventually began in 2014 and ran through until December 2017 (Nomadesc, 2014). The conceptual development process involved consulting with not only the leaders of the organisations involved, but also travelling to the various territories of the UIP's member organisations in order to consult with the grassroots. What would a social movement university look like in practice? How would it differ from the diploma programme? How would the university be run, on what organisational, political and pedagogical principles? These were the questions grappled with by Nomadesc and the movements involved. The process included creating spaces of debate and exchange with other social movement or popular university processes from Colombia and other Latin American countries.

An alternative university concept

The thinking behind the UIP challenged the traditional conception of the university as an institution for the academic production of elite knowledge within capitalist modernity. This challenge ran through every aspect of the university, including the structure and organisation of the university. As with the diploma programmes, students were all representatives of the different social movements, communities and organisations that belong to the process. Entrance to the university is not based on the individual request but on nomination by the organisation or community involved. The organisational structure is horizontal, with general political, philosophical and organisational decisions taken by consensus in meetings of the general assembly (also referred to as the territorial academic council), in which all member organisations are represented, all current and former students invited to participate.

The following extended excerpt from my ethnographic notes provides an example of how consensus is achieved within the UIP, as well as the sense of the process as one in 'permanent construction':

This afternoon's session [of the UIP general assembly] entailed a long, fascinating discussion on the ongoing issue of whether the UIP will seek the accreditation of a formal university institution, or will certify the cohort themselves in alliance with other social movements. Certainly the predominant view within Nomadesc has all along been that the social movements themselves would certify the students, which is in line with the epistemological approach and the argument that in order to build alternatives, it is important to begin to take seriously the ancestral knowledge of the social movements and communities, to question academia and its approach to knowledge (and its enclosure). The majority of the elder generation present supported variations of this position, with varying levels of contempt for academia, Western science, and the erasure and co-option of other types of knowing. A poignant argument made by one leading Nomadesc member was: the universities are involved in the free trade agreements, the economic model, and the taking of ancestral knowledge, natural resources and biodiversity. Why do we need them when our idea was to go toe to toe with academia and propose an alternative approach?

Interestingly, the students of the UIP were almost unanimously in favour of seeking the external [institutional] certification (and certainly all of those who do not already have some university title), but almost all based on taking a strategic, pragmatic approach to engagement with the state and formal education. The argument of A (senior trade union activist and UIP facilitator) and B (young peasant activist, university graduate) was essentially: the pedagogical process doesn't change because people get a title at the end, but the title is something which can help individuals and their movements/processes. Examples were given of posts in projects going to people with no background in movements, simply because militants have no title. A's argument was: does the fact that he, C or D, have a title from a university devalue what they have done in their activism? A certificate from Nomadesc or the UIP holds no sway outside of the UIP. Undoubtedly bad things have come from academia, there are bad trends, but that doesn't mean that the title itself is the problem. B argued that we all engage with the state in different ways, and that the important thing is not to compromise our ideals or change our ways in that relation, but to use it to our advantage and instrumentalise. After two long rounds in which every participant was given 3 minutes to intervene, gradually a collective decision was reached as participants found common ground. The decision was taken that this cohort will seek accreditation from a university judged to be most aligned with or open to the UIP's vision, probably the Pedagogica in Bogota, but that the debate will be left open for future cohorts to determine for themselves. The decision to leave the debate open for future cohorts meant that for this particular cohort was in line with the ethos of 'permanent construction' as a dynamic process rather than a bureaucracy, and also gave added weight to the opinions of the current cohort. As I sat in the debate (taking the minutes for a large part), I couldn't help thinking that the debate itself was a pedagogical exercise in democratic debate and organising. (Kane, ethnographic fieldnotes, 2018).

The above describes the process of democratic debate through which consensus was achieved in a situation with entrenched, substantive differences. As stated above, participating in such a debate, with people on all sides putting forward reasoned arguments in a constructive, respectful and deeply political manner, can be understood as a pedagogical activity in itself, within the broad understanding of pedagogy set out elsewhere in this thesis. The excerpt also provides an insight into the thinking which underpins the UIP's organisational approach.

The general assembly meetings take place three times per year. Operational decisions are taken by an academic Council, which is made up of authorities and leaders of all the movements and communities involved in the process. The UIP is conceived as a dynamic process of collective construction in progress rather than a complete, fixed process, in order to continuously respond to the ever-changing needs of social movements in the political, social and economic contexts of southwestern Colombia.

The shift to the UIP represented the consolidation and extension of the alternative epistemological approach and framework which had developed through over a decade of intercultural dialogue and praxis-

based learning. From the beginning, the process had been characterised by an epistemological sensitivity to the knowledges, organisational forms, cultures and struggles of the movements involved (particularly the ancestral epistemologies of indigenous and Afro-Colombian movements), and these had been seen as an important element of the learning process. Within the collective process of developing the UIP, the praxis sought to embed this ethos at the very centre of the university's pedagogical content and processes:

For me it's important to have a university based on our own thought, because that generates identity, and so it allows us to think in different logics, in alternative forms of exercising authority in our territories, to think about autonomy, to think about cultural practices. I think that we are trying to change the world, and for me education is central to that, as Malcolm X said we can either educate ourselves to be slaves or we can educate ourselves to be free, I think today we have to think about the environment and nature, because we aren't the owners, but we are part of nature... so I think we have a challenge of building together from the basis of our differences... I don't necessarily have to think or organise the same as the indigenous *compañeros* or the peasant movements, we each have our own logic in the way we see the world, our own logic and how we organise, but we also have things in common, and we can come together and think together respecting our differences... (Rural Afro-Colombian community leader, former student in later phases of diploma, interview, 2018).

...we were seeing that the [mainstream] university was changing the kids who went to study there, the few that got to go would be made to feel that we speak wrong, so that is the first thing that they go changing, and from there they...I think one of the things we've learned is that we need to put our heart into this university, because it is our own university where our own knowledge is validated, because often in our community, a lawyer might arrive and they can have all of their knowledge as a lawyer but on the technical knowledge or territorial knowledge, they haven't a clue, so we have to start to value our ancestral knowledge and that is what the UIP is about. (Rural Afro-Colombian community leader who was a diploma student in the early years, interview, 2018).

4.4 Pedagogical praxis, structure and content of the UIP

The leap from the diploma programme to the UIP on an organisational and pedagogical level meant a switch to an extended three-year course. The new course was divided into 3 different blocks or 'cycles' of one year each, with three different thematic modules. Sessions were taught in residential weekend workshops throughout the year calendar and combining theory and practice.

The first year is the 'Foundation cycle' in which participants are introduced to the core background of each of the modules. The second year is the 'Investigation cycle' during which the course continues with a focus upon the students' participatory action research projects. The third and final year is the 'Consolidation and culmination cycle', in which thematic learning is consolidated and deepened and investigation

projects are culminated. In this extended format, the participatory action research process is given an even more prominent role, and participants are supported in designing and implementing their investigation processes.

The thematic content underwent a transition: human rights remained an important element, but the UIP places much greater emphasis on providing the participating movements with the skills and knowledges which they require in order to work together in order come up with their own solutions, and share the knowledge which can aid the construction of alternative models. The three thematic modules for the first cohort were, 'Development Models and the Rights of the Peoples'; 'Life Plans and Social Humanism'; and 'Sovereignties and Buenvivir⁶'. The 'Development Models and the Rights of the Peoples' module examined *'basic structures, foundations and principles of development models and human rights frameworks, with emphasis upon collective rights and common goods'* (Nomadesc (archival documents), 2015). This meant that as well as including the Rights of People as contained in the Algiers Charter, this module also included content on the collective ethnic rights of indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities, including aspects such as alternative governance and legal systems.

Further, the module included deep discussion of the issues affecting communities in their territories and sought to generate discussion around potential solutions.

...we looked at how the state has its own sophisticated machinery for emptying out our territories, and we discussed the mega-projects which are affecting our different territories, it was something which was really important for us in our territories because we also discussed how we can confront this development model, this slavery economic development, and what we can do in our communities to carry on resisting, what

⁶ 'Buen Vivir or Vivir Bien, are the Spanish words used in Latin America to describe alternatives to development focused on the good life in a broad sense. The term is commonly used by social movements; it has become a popular term in some government programs and has even found its way into two new Constitutions in Ecuador and Bolivia....It refers to alternatives concepts to development emerging from indigenous traditions, and in this sense the concept explores possibilities beyond the modern Eurocentric tradition. The richness of the term is difficult to translate into English. It includes the classical ideas of quality of life, but with the specific idea that well-being is only possible within a community. Furthermore, in most approaches the community concept is understood in an expanded sense, to include Nature. Good Living therefore embraces the broad notion of well-being and cohabitation with others and Nature. In this regard, the concept is also plural, as there are many different interpretations depending on cultural, historical and ecological setting.' (Gudynas, 2011:p441)

strategies can we implement (urban Afro-Colombian community leader in Buenaventura, interview, 2018).

The 'Life Plans and Social Humanism' module introduces participants to the indigenous concept of 'life plans' (plan de vida), a methodology of strategic planning used to help movements and communities to think more strategically and long-term in their organising. The life plan methodology is based on a rejection of the very concept of 'development' (and its connotations of capitalism, progress and accumulation), and instead rooted in a recognition of cultural, organisational and territorial particularities of communities and movements, and based on the indigenous notion of *buenvivir*. Life plans can be understood as a collectively produced long-term vision for how a collective subject (community, movement, organisation) wishes to live in the future in their territory; and a strategic plan of how it will organise in the short, medium and long term to achieve this vision. The life plan methodology is rooted in the alternative conceptualisations of temporality of indigenous communities, who tend to think not in terms of decades or even one lifetime, but rather in multiple lifetimes and generations. The module also seeks to give participants a grounding and understanding of the principles and ideas of social humanism in relation to social movement organising (ibid; Kane ethnographic fieldnotes).

This aims to provide participants with an understanding of the basic concepts and principles, as well as the methodological knowledge and skills to be able develop a life plan within their own community or movement (Nomadesc (archival documents), 2015). It also seeks to engage and promote alternative values, concepts and terminologies, as part of the recognition that an emancipatory educational process must seek to break away from the reproduction of the conceptual constructions which have served as part of the broader system of oppression:

Often we don't plan in a real sense, we have our own concepts, we have a life project...we have to think about the language and terms we use, it is a constant debate that we have had, we are doing alternative education and if we want to build alternatives and change our life plans, we must also start to challenge concepts which come from capitalist terminology and aren't based on our own constructions and what we have ([as subaltern sectors]....that means going back to valuing ancestral medicine, these types of knowledge...and this helps us to recognise ourselves and to recognise the enormous potential that we have and the strength that we have as peoples. (Activist from Red Proyecto Sur youth collective, interview, 2018)

The 'Sovereignities and Buenvivir' module is based upon the revindication of alternative strategies, techniques and knowledges which can form the basis for the construction of alternative forms of living and organising. These may be on a very practical level - for example around the use of medicinal plants or the construction of community viaducts; or may be around conceptual constructions, such as alternative

concepts of human dignity and the environment, and alternative epistemological principles. The intercultural knowledge dialogue forms the basis of this module, and is harnessed in order to circulate and inter-weave knowledges which can be of use to the movements in their struggles.

The transformation of the pedagogical content with the leap to the UIP can be understood as a manifestation of the epistemological paradigm shift which occurred within the pedagogical process from the mid-2000s onwards. This shift was brought about by the increased participation of rural indigenous, Afro-Colombian and peasant movements in the process, along with the shifting regional dynamics. Of relevance here is the way in which this shift can help to understand the de-centring of human rights, and a change in the 'destination' or 'utopia' of the process. The early years of the process were rooted within modernist epistemological frameworks, and underpinned by a critical deployment of human rights discourse shaped by a Southern Marxist critique (hence emphasising the collective dimensions of economic, social and cultural rights and the Rights of Peoples of the Algiers Charter, as well as the right of peoples to rebel and take up collective armed struggle. The paradigm shift entailed a shift to a broader critique of Western modernity, as well as capitalism and imperialism. This critique, amongst other things, calls into question the notion of a fixed utopian endpoint, and a pre-defined (ideological) route for arriving to the promised land. This questioning required a rethinking of both the destination and the means of getting there: from a pre-ordained model and route map, to an emphasis on a collectively constructed utopia which is created through the struggle itself, and in which the different epistemologies, knowledges, cultures and histories of diverse subjects are the building blocks for a new world. This shift is reflected in the transformation of the pedagogical process described above. The paradigm shift is discussed further in chapter 6.

Territorial pedagogy

It was decided from the beginning that the university would be 'itinerant': as opposed to having a fixed site as is the common perception of a university, the UIP takes as its site the territories of the communities and social movements across the southwest of Colombia which form part of the process. This was the continuation and expansion of the territorial-experiential dimension of the pedagogy which has been gradually developed throughout the history of the process. Within the pedagogical practice, this means that a central aspect of the approach is to carry out '*recorridos territoriales*'. This roughly translates as territorial trails or journeys, and are activities in which the group travels to a community and the residential workshops are held in that territory, based upon dialogue exchange through which the students learn out about the history, culture, context and struggle of the community in the area, and

exchange experiences. These activities allow students to understand the intercultural aspect of the UIP from an anthropological and sociological perspective, through interchange, observation and experience. The aim is for students to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of the different peoples and communities of Colombia- black, indigenous, campesinos, and urban communities- as well as their struggles (Kane, ethnographic fieldnotes). This is a prominent element of the UIP's pedagogy: the importance of the relationship of the community to its territory, the understanding of a territory in order to strengthen its collective defence, in a region which has seen huge levels of forced displacement over recent decades.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented a comprehensive characterisation of the pedagogical process, along with an in-depth discussion of the historical evolution of the pedagogical process from its inception through to its current format as the UIP. It has traced its relationship with the struggles of the social movements involved in the process, as well as the social, economic and political conjunctures of the region. This receptivity to the ever-changing context makes it a particularly dynamic pedagogical praxis. The chapter has demonstrated the evolution of thinking and praxis which has occurred within the pedagogical praxis, as a result of Nomadesc's receptivity to the ever-changing conjunctures and sensitivity to the cultural and political diversity of the participating movements. Hence, it can be argued that Nomadesc's praxis has undergone an organic decolonisation process, driven not by engagement with academic debates but rather through proximity, collaboration and collective struggle with social movements with alternative, ancestral epistemologies. The following two chapters build upon the discussion in this chapter in order to present an in-depth analysis of the learning and knowledge production processes which are generated within the pedagogical process.

Chapter 5: Tracing learning and knowledge processes through a grounded case study

In order to provide a grounded account of Nomadesc's pedagogical praxis and trace the undulating learning and knowledge production processes which it produces, this chapter draws upon a case study of one of southwest Colombia's most prominent social movements, the Proceso de Comunidades Negras Palenque el Congal Buenaventura (PCN-BN). This is the first of two analysis chapters.

The chapter begins with a discussion of Nomadesc's radical pedagogical approach, demonstrating how this praxis has since its inception been immersed in the social realities and struggles of social movements in the region, and exploring the learning processes which emerge as a result. The discussion builds throughout in order to trace the impacts upon PCN-BN at the internal level as a result of the participation of leading activists in the diploma programme during the early 2000s. Drawing on interviews with PCN-BN activists, I identify a significant shift in the collective consciousness of the PCN-BN which can be attributed to the pedagogical process, as well as major changes in PCN-BN's organising and pedagogical praxis. We then follow these ripple learning effect processes through the PCN-BN and out to the external level of the broader struggles in which PCN-BN has been involved.

I use the term ripple learning effect to refer to the undulating processes through which the knowledge and learning processes generated by participation in Nomadesc's pedagogical initiative create chains of learning within the participating social movements, their social struggles, territories and networks. Ripple learning effects can be traced along temporal and geographical dimensions in order to identify the political impact of a pedagogical process upon broader social struggles. Without arguing direct causation, I contend that the ripple learning effects from the Nomadesc pedagogical process had a transformative impact upon PCN-BN's praxis and consequently contributed to a historic social uprising in Buenaventura in 2017. My analysis highlights the spatio-temporal dimensions of the impacts of these learning processes across movements, territories and time in the southwest region.

The analysis in this chapter focusses upon the collective, organisational level rather than individual level. Whilst it is clear that such change at the collective level is underpinned by changes at the personal level, the latter are backgrounded in this chapter. The pedagogical strategy seeks to have an impact on the social movements which are part of the process: on their actions, their organising, and especially upon their struggles. These objectives are pursued *through* pedagogical work with individual representatives of these

collectives. By drawing upon interviews with key PCN-BN activists in order to trace the learning and knowledge production processes which occur at the collective level, this chapter identifies a shift in collective consciousness with large implications for the movement's organising, and by extension the struggle of social movements in Buenaventura.

5.1 Context: PCN-BN and Buenaventura

The PCN-BN has played a central role throughout history and the collective construction of the pedagogical process, as a grassroots social movement which represents the voice of black communities in the territory of Buenaventura, Colombian Pacific region. PCN-BN was the local coordinating organisation for the diploma programmes that took place in Buenaventura from 2002 onwards, and has played a central role as part of the UIP. At the time when the participation of the PCN-BN in the diploma began, the communities of Buenaventura in both urban and rural areas were experiencing a situation of acute violence, caused by the arrival of armed groups in the territory, in particular paramilitary groups which were committing massacres, enforced disappearances, and triggering large-scale enforced displacement (Centro Nacional de Memoria Historica, 2015). As a result of previous struggles for territorial ethnic rights of black communities in rural areas, the PCN-BN's organisational and strategic approach had previously been more focussed upon rural communities, where organisational processes were strongest.



Photo 5.1: Diploma workshop in Buenaventura, 2004. Credit: Nomadesc

The city of Buenaventura is crucial to the economic model implemented by successive Colombian governments, in which increased international trade is a central pillar. It is Colombia's principal port on the Pacific Ocean: it has been estimated that more than 60% of Colombian imports and exports pass through the various port facilities in Buenaventura (Taula Catalana por los Derechos Humanos en Colombia, 2016:p6). In the early 1990s, driven by neoliberal policies, the privatisation of the port and mass lay-offs and casualisation of the workforce worsened the already precarious social conditions for the local population. Today, the world-class port facilities contrast with the conditions of the city's population: the city has basic healthcare facilities, and abysmal domestic water, sewerage and drainage infrastructure. The unemployment rate according to state institutions is around 64% (compared to a national average of about 10%), while the same proportion of urban households live in poverty (it is much higher in rural areas – about 92%) (Centro de Memoria Historica, 2015: p59), making it one of the poorest municipalities in Colombia.

The scale of violence and human rights violations suffered by Buenaventura's population, both urban and rural, has been high even by Colombia's standards since the beginning of this century. Armed groups, in particular paramilitaries, have created a permanent humanitarian crisis for the local population. According to government figures, over 196,000 people in Buenaventura, or 47% of the total population, have been victims of the political violence in some way (El Tiempo newspaper, 2017). Over 100,000 people have been forcibly displaced from the city. In 2014, Human Rights Watch released a report that documented how paramilitary groups routinely 'forcibly disappeared' and dismembered their victims in so-called *casas de pique*⁷ and enforced strict military control over vast areas of the city (Human Rights Watch, 2014). This violence takes place with almost total impunity in one of Colombia's most militarised cities, with a huge police and military presence.

Since the early 2000s, as well as the aforementioned violence, populations living in areas reclaimed from the sea by communities whose culture and livelihoods are inextricably linked to their proximity to the seafront, have increasingly seen their environment privatised and degraded, impeding in many cases their

⁷ This is the colloquial term used to refer to houses in Buenaventura neighbourhoods where paramilitaries take their victims in order to dismember them, and from where neighbours are able to hear victims' screams (Human Rights Watch, 2014).

access to traditional fishing routes in the sea and mangrove swamps. This is as a result of these areas being earmarked for the expansion of port operations and tourism initiatives.

5.2 Knowledge and learning processes of a praxis rooted in struggle

Nomadesc's working relationship with PCN-BN began around the turn of the century in response to the human rights crisis which was occurring in the rural and urban areas of Buenaventura. Initially it involved working together to document, monitor and seek to prevent human rights violations, as Nomadesc provided human rights accompaniment and advice. Hence, Nomadesc's collaborative work with PCN-BN pre-dated PCN-BN's involvement in the pedagogical process: this participation came about as part of the broader human rights strategy developed by the two organisations. This illustrates a key characteristic of the pedagogical process: it has always been integrated with broader political strategies for social action. This is a pedagogical praxis which was born and has always been deeply rooted in the social struggles of the southwest region of Colombia, and that exists in order to strengthen and benefit the participating social movements in their struggles. It is an initiative which is a product of a broader commitment to the quest for social transformation:

... it can't be detached from the process of building to seek social transformation, if it had not been linked to that broader objective then it would simply be a subsistence process ... that is the key, the education and training is linked to a political initiative ... always with the clarity that the [pedagogical] model had to serve to the cause of seeking social transformation, if it didn't then it wouldn't make sense...the whole point of the process is to contribute to the social movement, to strengthen the social movement, to create social movement. (current leading Nomadesc member, and diploma student during early years, interview, 2018)

The quotation clearly articulates the *raison d'être* of the pedagogical process: this is an educational initiative with an emancipatory political purpose. It provides an insight into the intentionality and logic which guides the entire process. Through the pedagogical process, Nomadesc seeks to harness learning and knowledge processes towards the social transformations for which the social movements struggle.

A shift in collective consciousness

This proximity of the pedagogical process to the social realities of the social movements and their struggles facilitates the generation of knowledge and learning processes which are based upon these realities, and which aim to provide participants with a deeper understanding of the contexts and issues which they face. According to several PCN-BN interviewees, it was the participation of key PCN-BN activists in the diploma programme which spurred the organisation to develop an analysis of the structural causes that were

driving the wave of violence in Buenaventura, and particularly the responsibility of national and international macro-economic processes as drivers of that violence:

'The whole situation of violence began - all the massacres, displacements, assassinations... and the human rights situation in Buenaventura became very complex... we hadn't made an association in terms of what it meant and what was really going on, the link between violence and territory, or violence and capitalism - those relations of capital that were driving the violence, yes? In every meeting ... there was the issue of violence, but it hadn't clicked that it could be... a war strategy based on trying to empty the territories, and then appropriate those territories, I came to hear that analysis on the Nomadesc diploma ... because those of us who did the diploma were the core of our PCN-BN activists, very qualified activists with a lot of experience ... it had a very big impact ...especially the sections when the teacher spoke about the whole topic of capital and development, but in the context of what Buenaventura meant for the world economy at that time as a key international port, when he explains all that and then explains that the violence that is happening in Buenaventura is not a coincidence but actually part of a strategy, we were all stunned...and he told us to get ready ... I do feel that the diploma served to help us to locate ourselves and give us a different perspective on what was happening in Buenaventura, and that analysis is just as relevant today. (PCN-BN activist, former student of diploma programme during early years, current facilitator for UIP)

... the diploma I think helped us collectively to fundamentally understand the interests and relationships that were woven between the different actors involved in the war, and who created this complex situation of death in our communities ... It provided many elements to help us understand how the state, the armed forces and the paramilitaries operated jointly, to understand the cruelty of the perpetual war by the paramilitaries but also the responsibility and actions of the insurgency in the Pacific region. (Participant, territorial workshop, Buenaventura, 2018)

The citations above provide an insight into how the participation of the PCN-BN in the diploma course had an impact at the collective-organisational level, in terms of how the movement came to understand the violence which was so affecting the communities in Buenaventura. They show how, as a result of this participation, the PCN-BN as an organisation began to understand that the violence being experienced was a strategy for territorial control and the appropriation of the territory of Buenaventura's majority black population. This significant collective learning process can be understood as a shift in the collective consciousness of the PCN-BN at organisational level, and its implications for the organisation's organising praxis are discussed further below.

Learning processes based on the realities of participants

The foregoing discussion also displays an important difference with more orthodox approaches to emancipatory political education initiatives: the starting point for any theme which is dealt with within the

educational space is always the everyday experience of the activists and their movements. The following citation articulates the methodological horizontality of the process:

...it meant going to the territories and being immersed in the communities, and based on their practices, based on their experiences, on their work, their identity, their culture and their history, develop pedagogical strategies which could bring about small or large transformations...it meant generating processes which weren't static, which weren't fixed, but which were permanently being changed and permanently being creatively developed (Nomadesc founding member and current leading member of the organisation, interview, 2018) .

This quote allows us to grasp another central premise of Nomadesc's pedagogical philosophy: that the participants are protagonists who are not only *knowers of*, but also *experts in* their own reality. That is to say, activists possess unique situated knowledge which emerges from their daily experience of involvement within collective struggle, and because their movements are embedded within the social realities which they seek to transform. Nomadesc's is a praxis of collective construction between diverse perspectives. The dynamic and collaborative way in which the content of the process is built based on the realities of the movements. The proximity of Nomadesc with those realities and the struggles of the collectives, as well as the cultures and organisational forms of the organisations, ensures that the content remains relevant and useful for the participants and their organisations in order to provide practical and applicable tools, and to deepen the critical consciousness of participants.

Building a macro analysis by piecing together diverse experiences

As demonstrated through the experience of PCN-BN discussed above, Nomadesc's pedagogical praxis seeks to develop and deepen the capacity of participants to analyse their realities and to situate them in relation to broader economic, political and social macro-processes. Nomadesc and the social movements it works with have lived and experienced first-hand the violence which underlies the macro-economic processes related to capitalist globalisation and expansion of the capitalist market in Colombia.

The encounter between activists from different territories, facilitated as part of Nomadesc's work (including but not limited to the pedagogical strategy), along with ongoing investigative work, has allowed the organisation to maintain an up to date in-depth political economy analysis of the ever-changing dynamics and impacts of the armed conflict and the implementation of the extractivist neoliberal economic model in the territories of southwest Colombia: the actors which perpetrate and benefit from violence in the region, and the strategies and dynamics at play. This facilitates, through the local experiences of activists, the tracing of macro-processes, the changing conjunctures, and the inter-

connections which exist. It has also allowed Nomadesc to identify the structural factors driving human rights violations and the armed conflict in the region, and hence to work with movements to develop strategies to counteract these processes. The pedagogical emphasis placed on the lived experience of the participants as the entry point for understanding plays a decisive role in the development of participants' capacity for critical analysis. This can be understood as a process of grassroots knowledge construction through the aggregation of the different experiences of the participating social movements in their territories around the region:

It really was a break with the education model that had been the norm in social movements, because people felt they could relate to the topic, not just on the micro terrain of their problem within their community, but also in the understanding of the global nature of issues...knowledge was built from below from everyday life but also reflected in the macro framework and that was a novel relationship, because the norm was to go from the macro to the small, it was very systemic in how it approached problems- political economy says this and is reflected locally here in this way, but we said let's start from the problem and the community and understand the macro, so that inversion of categories allowed people to understand things better and relate them to their own situation. (Trade unionist and facilitator during early years of pedagogical process, interview, 2018)

In this way, by collating their different knowledges and experiences, the intercultural collective of Nomadesc and the participating social movements come to be more than the sum of their individual knowledges and develop a dynamic, panoramic understanding of region's political, economic and social dynamics. This deeper understanding serves to strengthen Nomadesc's work with social movements, and is fed into the pedagogical process as demonstrated by the PCN-BN case study, in a continuous, symbiotic learning process between Nomadesc and the movements.

A dialectic of social movement learning

The foregoing discussion provides the basis for reflection upon the relationship between the pedagogical process and the ever-changing political, social and economic conjunctures of the region. It is useful here to think dialectically in order to understand how '*all social phenomena change constantly through their constant dialectical interaction with each other*' (Lukacs, 1971, cited in Halvorsen, 2017). The reality of social movements and their struggles- whether they be struggles in defence of territory, against the privatisation of public services, or for access to basic services such as housing or healthcare – is not static, but one which is in constant dialectical motion through the constant tussle with hegemonic forces:

'the (capitalist economic development) model is always seeking to advance, seeking new strategies to maintain and extend its power and protect the status quo, and this

obliges the communities and social movements to also be constantly developing new strategies' (current leading Nomadesc member, and diploma student during early years, interview, 2018).

My research evidences a dialectical relationship between Nomadesc's pedagogical process and the struggles of the social movements which are part of the process. As demonstrated by the foregoing discussion of PCN-BN's participation in the diploma, the pedagogical process itself exists in order to intervene in and strengthen those struggles. At the same time it is constantly altered and shaped through its proximity to the dynamic realities/contexts of the communities and the struggles which it aims to transform. This dialectic, and its influence in constantly (re)shaping the initiative, are reflected in chapter 3 in the different phases which have been identified throughout the history of the process. These phases betray a fundamental characteristic of the initiative: the pedagogical process is itself a constant learning process based on a praxis of struggle, and as such is a dynamic pedagogical intervention which is in permanent construction. Hence, to trace the history of the Nomadesc pedagogical process is to trace and map out the learning which has occurred within it. This dialectic generates a process of constant learning which drives the continuous renewal and adaptation of the process. It is this ability to constantly adapt, renew and reinvent which has allowed the pedagogical process to continue for over two decades, and which has maintained its relevance for the social movements which have been part of it.

First-hand lessons about transnational capital in the peripheries

Activists from the social movements of the UIP have been able to verify through their own experience how the violence of the state and its paramilitary allies in rural areas has obeyed a capitalist economic logic in the interests of economic elites. Experiences such as those of the PCN-BN activists in Buenaventura are fed into the UIP's intercultural knowledge dialogue, generating valuable learning processes amongst participants, not only in understanding their own situation, but in gaining a broader, deeper understanding of the structural political economy dynamics of Colombian social reality.

In Buenaventura, through Nomadesc's extensive work with local organisations, it has been possible to document and demonstrate how the processes of extreme violence against the civilian population, including enforced disappearance, massacres and the infamous casas de pique, are related to large corporate infrastructure projects which have to do with the expansion of the port facilities and the creation of tourist areas, large-scale projects involving national and transnational capital, and all planned in areas which came to be most affected by violence and displacement (National Memory Commission Historical, 2015):

the paramilitarism is not isolated from these [corporate development] projects, and Plan Colombia was never isolated from that either, nor is the assassination of the leaders detached from that, nor the road to Buenaventura...if you look all of capital's development projects, that coincides with the maps of the paramilitarism violence, we can't ignore that (current leading Nomadesc member, and diploma student during early years, interview, 2018)

Such are the realities which form part of the daily experiences of activists involved in the struggles of the movements of the UIP. It is one thing to read about such realities, and quite another to experience them first-hand. For these activists, terms such as accumulation by dispossession, imperialism, extractivism, and neoliberal globalisation are measured in dead bodies, death threats and enforced displacement. What more transformative, consciousness-raising tutorial on the meaning of imperialism could a resident of the seafront neighbourhoods of Buenaventura be provided with than facing attempts by paramilitaries to forcibly displace them from land which their community has built up and reclaimed from the sea over generations in order to clear the way for large-scale tourism redevelopment projects involving Western corporations? The Nomadesc pedagogical process simply provides a framework for understanding the drivers of such phenomena, and for joining up the dots of the structural forces driving such phenomena (Kane, ethnographic fieldnotes, 2018).

Key to this learning process of developing participants' consciousness and understanding of the social reality which they face is the participatory action research (PAR) element of the pedagogy, discussed in chapter 4. Using the PAR methodology, students are supported in developing their own research projects into a specific issue which is facing their own movement or community. These projects are always closely related to social action: that is, they are intended to have real-world impacts upon the praxis and struggles of the movements involved. In some cases, they have led on to protests or campaigns. Hence, participants from Buenaventura looked into issues including the planned port expansion in the city, and the impacts of illegal mining activities in rural areas.

This approach puts the emphasis on providing tools and knowledge in order for participants to gain a deeper understanding of reality at the local level, and thus develop the critical consciousness and capacity for political analysis of the participants. Below, an Afro-Colombian community leader explains how the process helped him understand the way in which the free trade agreement signed between Colombia and the United States would directly impact his community:

...for example, the Free Trade Agreement (FTA). It's something we heard about as something done by these people away over there, and then in the class I could identify

how the FTA in the case of La Toma [community] specifically impacted upon us, yeah? The territorial problems we have – dispossession, the dynamic of the armed conflict - are framed by that economic model, for me these were very important tools' (Rural Afro-Colombian community leader who was a diploma student in the early years, interview, 2018).

Changes in PCN-BN's praxis

The discussion above demonstrated the shift in collective consciousness which occurred within the PCN-BN as a result of participation in the diploma and the learning processes experienced by PCN-BN activists. It is equally important to consider how the praxis of PCN-BN was influenced by these learning processes. According to one of the respondents, the PCN-BN's participation in the diplomas led to a significant change in how the organisation responded to acts of violence, thanks to the change it had caused in how violence was understood:

I think that [the diploma] divided it into before and after in terms of the approach of the PCN-BN, at least in Buenaventura, because we began to take a more political and organised approach to the violence, not just about picking up the dead bodies that were left in each massacre, but for example we started to make a more serious and accurate documentation and make our own reports because the state reports always underestimated and under-reported(...) for me that diploma marked the turning point for the PCN-BN to begin to understanding and transcend what was happening with the violence and how it related to a much larger strategy great strategy linked to the megaproject... (PCN-BN activist, former student of diploma programme during early years, current facilitator for UIP)

This citation demonstrates a shift in PCN-BN's praxis, describing how the organisation adopted a more organised, analytical approach to dealing with the violent situation. It makes clear that participation within the diploma course not only helped generate a deeper and more political analysis of the factors which were driving the violence, but also provided tools for the defence of human rights to respond to the immediate and urgent situation they were facing. Interviewees described other ways in which the PCN-BN's organising approach was influenced by this participation in the diploma including changes in political organising strategies as a result of the change in the organisation's way of understanding the context and the issues they faced. According to an interviewee, beginning to understand violence as a strategy to displace communities spurred the development of a new urban community organising strategy by PCN-BN in defence of urban territories, under the same banner of the defence of territory which they used when organising in rural territories. Hence, the urban situation in Buenaventura began to be articulated as a struggle for territory, and PCN-BN began organisational-pedagogical process to raise awareness of urban communities and organise them in the defence of their territory.

Another manifestation of the influence of PCN-BN's participation upon the organisation's own praxis is the way in which PCN-BN went on to adopt methodological and philosophical aspects of Nomadesc's pedagogical praxis within their own organising and pedagogical work. This is a clear example of a ripple learning effect. For example, the organisation developed its own diploma programme, with a methodology similar to the Nomadesc diploma, and with participants from diverse movements and organisational processes in Buenaventura:

[we set it up as] an initiative of our own, based on the experience we had already gained with Nomadesc, and from there the PCN-BN began to run many diploma programmes with other organisations, and I think in turn this also served as an example or guide for others to begin their own processes (ibid)

Hence PCN-BN set up its own pedagogical initiative bringing together movements and organisations across the sprawling and diverse urban and rural territories of Buenaventura, with the aim of strengthening and deepening political subjectivities of activists, and at the same time building the broader social movement network in the region by fomenting unity and collaboration. This is a crucial point because it demonstrates that PCN-BN adopted within its pedagogical-organisational praxis a central tenet of Nomadesc's philosophy, namely the utilisation of radical pedagogy as a tool for weaving unity and generating collaboration amongst diverse movements and struggles. As a result of participation in the Nomadesc pedagogical process, PCN-BN's own pedagogical praxis was strengthened. The citation also evidences that in turn, the educational process of the PCN-BN inspired new pedagogical processes in the PCN-BN's sister organisations, again replicating aspects of the methodology, demonstrating a ripple effect learning process. Understanding and tracing such ripple effect learning processes is vital to understanding the types of impact which radical pedagogical processes can have. These effects are explored further below.

A further methodological aspect which was adopted by PCN-BN following its participation in the Nomadesc diploma programme was that the organisation began to stage an annual event bringing together social movements, human rights organisations, trade unions and communities from across the region:

PCN-BN...began to organise some events based on joy, and on the freedom of the peoples of the south west of Colombia, in those events, activists from across the south west were invited ... and at those events we would use them to analyse the regional context, in particular the human rights situation...that is also a product of [our involvement in] this whole education process, and starting to read what the structural causes of the conflict were (PCN-BN activist, facilitator and ally throughout history of the pedagogical process, interview, 2018)

These events were inspired by Nomadesc's annual '*Tejendo Resistencia*' event, which historically would be held every year to mark the end of the diploma programmes. The PCN-BN event was called 'Marking Territory' (*Marcando Territorio*), and functioned as an opportunity for sister organisations to come together to weave joy and generate solidarity and unity. At the same time, the events provided an opportunity to collectively analyse the political context and conjunctures in the region with a particular focus on the Pacific region, and to collectively generate strategies, based upon the recognition of the interdependence of their different struggles. The participation of activists from movements across the region allowed for rich regional conjunctural analyses, whilst collaboration for social action remained primarily focussed upon Buenaventura. These events would give birth to an organising initiative which would go on to have monumental consequences for the city of Buenaventura.

Ripple learning effects

The discussion above explored the significant impact which PCN-BN's participation in the diploma programme had at the collective level, and demonstrated how PCN-BN altered its pedagogical and organising praxis as a result of its participation in the diploma programme, adopting aspects of Nomadesc's methodological approach, including the *Marking Territory* events mentioned above. As one of Buenaventura's most forthright and prominent social movements, PCN-BN was perfectly placed to stage such events, which served to create a newfound, networked cohesion between social movements and diverse civil society organisations including small businesses and religious sectors, with a view to generating collaborative social action on the social, economic and political crises facing Buenaventura.

One collaborative initiative which emerged from a Marking Territory event in 2014 was a march against violence in Buenaventura that took place in February 2014:

the march committee came out of a Marking Territory event ... I think it was the third one we had done ... the violence was at its peak, and we were the ones putting forward a structural analysis of what is happening, "Hey, listen up, there is not only a problem of violence, they are also taking away our land"... so at the meeting people said we have to do something, they are taking Buenaventura away from us...so we left the forum ... and I think that in the same afternoon we decided to meet in the PCN-BN office with the organisations that were there and other organisations that weren't part of the committee but arrived anyway and we all said no, is time to meet and decide what can be done...after that we called another larger meeting ... The word began to spread, and more and more sectors joined and from there the March committee for Buenaventura was set up. (PCN-BN activist, former student of diploma programme during early years, current facilitator for UIP)

The organisers of the march estimated that more than forty thousand people participated. The huge turnout, and the coordination between such diverse organisations in Buenaventura, generated an organisational momentum between various social, community and union organisations in the city, with the PCN-BN playing a leading role. Activists from the organisations began to meet every week to plan their next move, and they quickly arrived at the conclusion that something much bigger than a march was needed in order to address the deep structural issues in Buenaventura. They decided to begin a painstaking organising process in order to build towards a civic strike (Kane, 2019). In 2017 an unprecedented civic movement emerged from this process that would go on to organise the Civic Strike to Live with Dignity in the Territory of Buenaventura. More than 120 social movements and other civil society organisations paralysed the city for 22 days, achieving massive and almost generalised levels of participation amongst the city's population and paralysing the most important port city in Colombia.



Photo 5.2: A huge, historic march during the civic strike in Buenaventura, 21st May 2017. Credit: Patrick Kane

The strike was based on a list of demands to improve the miserable living conditions experienced by the majority of residents in Buenaventura. The narratives of much of the media coverage from the time served to give the impression that the strike had been a spontaneous uprising, as opposed to the result of years of meticulous organising and educational work by activists in the city:

...the accumulation that led Buenaventura to the great strike didn't happen overnight because a leader appeared saying that it was a good idea to have a civic strike: it was an accumulation of organising and education in which these processes that we are talking about played an important role, we had an influence in Buenaventura, we worked with the leaders and they were part of this pedagogical process ... and gradually this started to have a cumulative effect... I am not saying that it is the only factor or that somehow the civic strike is the direct heritage of this process, but it plays a part... we are talking about an entire city that is fed up and angry, but why does it get fed up and angry? [the situation that caused the strike] ... did not appear here in the 21st century, that has been a historical issue, so why then? ... It was achieved by creating an understanding amongst the population that they are just as valid citizens as those in the capital, they are bearers of rights and above all that they stand on a treasure chest, when people in Buenaventura understand the importance of the city's port strategically not only for the country, but for the world economy...that is part of the accumulated impact of the diploma, of the UIP, of all the organising, working with the leaders all that travelling back and forth, taking international delegations to meet activists there... it has been quite a process. (trade unionist and who has been involved in the design and delivery of the process since early phase of diplomas until present day, interview, 2018)

The citation above gives a sense of a chain of influence of the pedagogical process, or a ripple learning effect. Our foregoing discussion established that the participation of individual subjects representing the PCN-BN, had a large impact at the collective level upon the political consciousness of one of Southwest's most prominent social movements, transforming aspects of the movement's praxis and subsequently upon PCN-BN's sister organisations in Buenaventura. As the citation demonstrates, it can be argued that the pedagogical process contributed to one of Latin America's most important social struggles of the 21st century, without claiming direct causality nor ignoring the multiple factors and complexities involved in bringing about such a generalised uprising. Despite its intangible character and the difficulty of measuring such impacts scientifically, for an emancipatory pedagogical process there can surely be no more important indicator of success than the impacts we have identified here at the collective level and the level of social struggle.

The temporal dimension

Here I want to highlight the temporal dimension of the ripple learning effects traced in the discussion above: it begins early in the 2000s with the start of the diploma programmes in Buenaventura, and continues right through until the 2017 civic strike and beyond. Herein we can begin to grasp the temporality of the Nomadesc pedagogical process, and the consequences of a long-term approach. As discussed above, throughout those two decades the pedagogical process was one element of a broader, holistic Nomadesc strategy of strengthening social movements in Buenaventura in their struggles in defence of human rights and to improve the living conditions of the population, which

included human rights advocacy and research, socio-legal campaigning, mobilisation etc. This way of working with social movements means that over long periods of time the pedagogical process both influences and is influenced by these relationships. The long-term temporality of this approach to working with social movements facilitates the development of strong collaborative working relationships oriented towards social action, and imbued with human bonds of solidarity.

Nomadesc's approach to its working with social movements (including its pedagogical work) stands in contrast to that of many NGOs which work on a project-by-project basis. Rather than being shaped by the temporality of donor-funded projects, Nomadesc's long term approach allows it to be flexible and receptive to the alternative temporalities of communities, social movements and their struggles. The unpredictable and volatile nature of the human rights situation in the region also requires Nomadesc and the social movements it works with to be flexible and reactive in order to respond to human rights situations as they arise, as previously mentioned (Kane, ethnographic fieldnotes, 2018). In the demanding and at times highly fraught context of repression and violence that frames the existence of social movements in Colombia, taking the time to reflect on praxis and reality, and to exchange knowledge with activists from other struggles and organisations, is something which isn't often prioritised:

... sometimes situations make us react immediately to events, particularly relating to human rights violations mainly from the state and from the armed actors. It doesn't allow us to stop, think and reflect on what we are doing, and whether what we are doing is right or maybe we could do it better, right? And I think that the Intercultural University of the Peoples has allowed us [the opportunity to do] that, to sit down for a moment, to sit down one day to see what we are doing and see if what we are doing is right or maybe we could improve those practices and strengthen our organisation. (Activist peasant youth organisation, graduate of first cohort UIP, interview, 2018)

As the excerpt demonstrates, a strong emphasis is placed upon the relationship between action and understanding. The pedagogical process offers a space for activists to take a 'time out' from their daily struggle, step back, and dedicate time to reflect upon praxis and to exchange ideas and experiences, and adapt and strengthen praxis continuously according to the changing dynamics of the region, and the needs and demands which arise from their struggles. In order for this to happen, activists must be willing to disconnect from the demanding temporality of their organising in order to 'press pause' and fully engage in collective reflection. Therefore, the pedagogical space is itself characterised by an alternative temporality, which tends to be less rigid and more flexible than more traditional approaches to education. Our interviews with activists suggests that such 'pauses' are highly propitious for the generation of

profound learning processes. In the case of rural peasant, indigenous and Afro-descendent communities and social movements in Colombia, the temporality of their rural lifestyles is a manifestation of their alternative, non-capitalist epistemologies and value systems. In this sense, temporality can be understood as a contested terrain in the struggle against the hegemonic power structures. This clash is often apparent when in the course of their struggles these movements encounter state or corporate actors:

X reminded us today of an anecdote which I have heard her tell on several occasions, that sheds light upon the competing temporalities of social movements and the capitalist state, and on what an alternative approach to temporality might look like for progressive forces seeking to build alternatives to capitalism. The story tells how during the preparation for the 2008 debate between President Uribe and the indigenous communities of the Social and Communitarian Minga, a Nasa indigenous elder observed the frantic rush of his comrades to prepare for the debate and the arrival of the presidential convoy and commented, ‘compañeros, what is the hurry? Why do you run so much? This struggle has been going on for over 500 years, and it will continue for as long as it takes. Don’t rush, let’s take our time’. (Kane, ethnographic fieldnotes, 2018)

The excerpt above articulates a political rejection of the Western approach to temporality which underpins state institutions, and gives a sense of an alternative perspective upon temporality which is characteristic of rural Nasa indigenous communities in Colombia. Such alternative approaches to temporality must be taken into account as part of the construction of any intercultural project which envisions a world beyond capitalism. Nomadesc’s pedagogical praxis seeks to harness such approaches to temporality within the intercultural knowledge dialogue.

Collective memory and intergenerational dialogues as praxis of temporality

Another notable aspect of the temporality of Nomadesc’s pedagogical praxis which emerged from our research process were the mechanisms through which social movements’ histories and collective memories are converted into a pedagogical tool, providing counter-hegemonic knowledge as well as inspiration/hope to participants. Here I want to highlight two aspects of the praxis in particular: the strong emphasis on collective historical memory, and the facilitation of intergenerational dialogues.

As a human rights organisation, Nomadesc has since its inception made collective historical memory central to every aspect of its work, for example through the annual commemorations of murdered social leaders or massacres committed in the region. Through a praxis which emphasises and actively engages with the collective shared memories of activists and movements, Nomadesc ensures that its relational approach to pedagogy includes an ongoing dialogue with these alternative histories. These include previous struggles, martyrs, mobilisations, significant events, as well as engaging with the relational

cosmovisions of indigenous and Afro-descendent communities which emphasise connection to meta-kinship networks, including to non-living generations of ancestors. Through story-telling and a constant emphasis on remembering and sharing these histories within the pedagogical space, the praxis seeks to invoke and harness elements of these shared histories of the social movements involved (Kane, ethnographic fieldnotes, 2018). This includes the distinct histories of the individual movements, which are discussed, shared, celebrated and engaged as a pedagogical tool within the intercultural space; as well as the histories which pertain collectively to the different movements, such as historic mobilisations which they have collaborated on. In this way Nomadesc's praxis seeks to ensure that these shared histories provide learning, knowledge and inspiration and assist in influencing the process of the development of activist subjectivities, inspiring them in their own praxis and struggles. The pedagogical process reproduces and sustains counter-hegemonic knowledge which is contained within these alternative histories, harnessing it in order to foment learning process which allow the participating social movements to draw upon and learn from the struggles of those who have gone before. The following segment from my ethnographic fieldnotes demonstrates the role which collective memory plays within Nomadesc's praxis working with social movements:

Today we attended the celebrations for the anniversary of the Buenaventura civic strike. It left me reflecting upon the importance which Nomadesc places upon marking these types of occasion - whether it be to remember an event such as the civic strike, or the murder of an activist, or another significant event- it means investing time, money and a huge amount of energy. Why? It is central to Nomadesc's [general] praxis, and it is about the way that they engage collective memory as a tool within the struggle. This emphasis is also imbued within the pedagogical praxis, which is often tied into such events, for example by taking UIP students along. It is a really striking and inspiring thing to witness within Nomadesc's praxis, it is something which I had never really given much thought, but there is a real sense in which Nomadesc brings to life, or maintains alive, these shared histories, and makes participants feel a sense of connection and shared ownership of these previous struggles, and even of martyrs. In this way they not only generate valuable learning and knowledge processes, but also serve to inspire hope for participants. (Kane, ethnographic fieldnotes, 2018).

This emphasis upon counter-hegemonic collective memory is based on a view that these alternative histories, which have been invisible to hegemonic institutions including often to mainstream academic institutions, are the bearers of emancipatory potential. The praxis seeks to harness these alternative histories in order to create a sense of collective identity not based on all of the subjects having the same history, but based on the different histories and knowledges of the organisations involved in the process. In that sense, the past is harnessed in the present as a pedagogical tool which increases the consciousness

of participants and provides lessons and inspiration for the present and future of social struggles. Hence, movements' histories become tools for the reproduction of movements and the construction of new strategies of action.

It was clear within the research process that the emphasis on memory and the importance of collecting and keeping alive the history of movements has influenced the praxis of the students within their own organisations and social movements. The following citation phrase from a young peasant activist and graduate of the UIP demonstrates the centrality of memory as a theme within the praxis of the process, and how it has influenced the activism and organising within the social movements of the UIP.

[something which I took from the process] is the importance of memory and that is why now in almost all of the exercises I do with Macizo youth [youth wing of peasant organisation] I always insist on an activity around the collective memory of our organisation- what we have been, what we have done, what we know, what our predecessors did, right? To recognise the importance of the elders too, and recognise the importance of their knowledge of our territory and the strategies that they have had as leaders, and pay close attention to them, it's a really important exercise. (Activist peasant youth organisation, graduate of first cohort UIP, interview, 2018)

In the violent and repressive scenario of southwest Colombia, the preservation of historical memory, not only in terms of the archiving of materials but also through social movement praxis, becomes even more important as a process of reproduction, circulation and conservation of knowledge, and of the struggle itself. In a context where the action of military forces and paramilitary groups has eliminated hundreds of thousands of militants and community members, the act of remembering is an eminently political one, a rejection of the attempted erasure of the victims' memory by violent actors in the conflict, and by state institutions through official narratives relating to the conflict (Kane, ethnographic fieldnotes, 2018). Within the social movements of Colombia, and especially within Nomadesc's work, the praxis of collective remembering is a process full of symbology and ritual that emphasises the obligation to continue the struggle in order to honour the memory of the dead, as articulated by the popular slogan which is heard in social movements events and especially in events to commemorate the victims of political violence, *'my voice, which is shouting, my dream, which is still unbroken, and you should know, that I only die if you become weak, because those who die in struggle live on in each one of us!'*. In this way, the pain of grief, and the memory of the martyr, are collectivised and become unifying factors, becoming motivating elements which serve to increase the commitment to the cause. The different movements which are part of the pedagogical process remember and honour their martyrs but also those of the other movements involved in the process, hence reinforcing the process of generating common identity, solidarity and unity.

Intergenerational dialogue

Perhaps the most direct mechanism within the Nomadesc pedagogical praxis for engaging the collective historical memories of social movements are the intergenerational dialogues which occur within the intercultural learning space. The generation of discussions and debates between younger and elder activists, both within the group and special guests who have been part of the historical struggles, was highlighted by several interviewees as generators of learning and knowledge circulation. These intergenerational dialogues were identified as important both in terms of learning from previous struggles in order to improve praxis, and also in terms of strengthening identity and generating critical consciousness. Whilst these dialogues are usually organic, unstructured occurrences within the pedagogy, they have a very clear political intentionality within Nomadesc's pedagogical thinking which is primarily to overcome the tendency that exists within the organising processes of social movements to undervalue and fail to build upon the accumulated knowledge generated through previous struggles and which is, as explained by one facilitator in relation to the example of the trade union movement:

an atomised trade union movement means that one activist finishes and its another's turn the day after tomorrow, facing the same situation but worse, but they don't build upon the previous experience, because we don't do enough to join things up, I think [the intergenerational dialogues] is something that is very important....there is a very strong component of youth in the UIP, and the component of older adults, although there aren't as many, but it is highly valuable because the younger activists learn to engage with the more experienced activists. (trade unionist who has been involved in design and delivery of the process since early phase of diplomas until present day, 2018)

Yet it was clear within our research process that the learning processes which occur through these intergenerational interactions are certainly not asymmetrical, and are not limited to engaging with collective movement histories, as demonstrated in the following excerpt from my ethnographic fieldnotes:

There is much discussion of the importance intergenerational dialogues within the UIP, but if one goes looking for these dialogues within the UIP's workshops, they are difficult to identify. This is because more often than not we are not referring to a structured pedagogical activity which sets up such an intergenerational dialogue, but rather to the informal interactions which occur on an ongoing basis between the elder and younger participants who are joined together within the pedagogical process. This might include the chats which take place over lunch, or during a coffee break. And it is clear to me that the learning processes which arise from these interactions are mutual learning processes as opposed to one-way processes of younger activists learning from their elders. (Kane, ethnographic fieldnotes, 2018)

These intergenerational dialogues, which can be understood as an element of the intercultural dialogue which characterises the UIP, have the potential for the creation of new meanings and understandings through the interaction of activists who belong to different generations; have accumulated knowledge and experience of struggle from different eras; and whom in normal circumstances would rarely take the time to listen to and reflect upon each other's experiences and opinions.

Geographies of counter-hegemonic knowledge

This chapter's discussion also sheds light upon the geographical dimension of the pedagogical process. Nomadesc's pedagogical praxis links up social movements across their disparate and disperse territories, facilitating the interaction, interweaving and circulation of counter-hegemonic knowledges. Hence ripple learning effects undulate not only along the temporal dimension but also along the spatial dimension, as counter-hegemonic learning processes and knowledge cascades through the varied urban and rural territories of the social movements of the region, linked through their networked configurations. The PCN-BN case study demonstrates how practical knowledge for the defence of human rights; an analytical understanding of the structural causes of violence in Buenaventura; and pedagogical-organisational knowledge were all gained by PCN-BN through participation in the diploma programme, and were in turn transmitted from PCN-BN on to the communities, social movements and territories with which it worked, thus increasing capacity for resistance across territories. By way of example, a community leader from a remote Afro-Colombian riverine community in the Pacific jungle region of Buenaventura described how participation in the diploma programme provided her community with the capacity and confidence to engage with armed groups and demand respect for international humanitarian law within their territory, as well as putting it into practice in order to organise creatively in order to demand respect for the civilian population:

[what I learned from the diploma course] has served me a lot as a person, because I learned to be a critical leader and also because when you know what your rights are you learn to demand them rather than beg for them, and you learn how to demand them in the context of the conflict. For example, knowing about human rights and international humanitarian law... [was really useful] ...that was what we always referred to in our conversations with the armed groups [in our territory] ...one time, we put banners up all over the territory saying "we are not part of the conflict, we are civilian population"...it was a really tough period. So, [the diploma] was really useful to all of us.... if we hadn't done it, things would have been worse (participant, territorial workshop, Buenaventura, 2018)

As well as the circulation of the knowledges from Nomadesc onto the social movements involved, the pedagogical process also facilitates cross-pollination learning processes and circulation of counter-hegemonic knowledge *between* the participating movements and their territories:

It is about thinking collectively about what kind of model we want, or what plans of harmony and balance we are fighting for in our territories, so that is where a proposal like this gains strength from some of these strategies, no matter how small they are, they are still important and they are part of what we are trying to build, for example take the issue of food sovereignty and the dialogical learning exercise between different regions [involved in the pedagogical process], in the Centre of Valle [the peasant movement] have a very high level of food sovereignty, but in the Pacific [rural black communities involved in the process] communities they have a very low level, so in the process they have learned from each other, they share that knowledge and this is part of how resistance is created and sustained (Nomadesc founding member and currently a leading member of the organisation, interview, 2018).

The above citation demonstrates practical knowledge cross-pollination learning processes in action -the way in which the praxis seeks to circulate practical knowledge practices which are valuable for the construction of autonomous, alternative models of organising. Implicit here is an attempt to recover and preserve the knowledge practices of rural communities which facilitate more sustainable relationships to nature and hence are less dependent upon the capitalist economic system.

The strategy to link different organisational processes and territories is based on a relational and dynamic concept of how social struggles are constructed and evolve. The organisational processes of social movements are understood as dynamic, changing and the products of multiple interconnected relationships. In this conception, the intercultural knowledge dialogue is strengthened by this territorial aspect, which seeks to create a dialogue between territories, harnessing embodied learning processes in the process. The process generates geographies of counter-hegemonic knowledge, interweaving, building and multiplying knowledge among different territories of social movements. My research shows how as well as generating processes of dialogical, embodied and experiential learning, this territorial pedagogical interaction facilitates a space where subjects of different organisational processes can collectively discuss and imagine alternative futures and build their notions of utopia

Conclusion

In conclusion, through the case study of the PCN-BN this chapter has provided a grounded account of the functioning of Nomadesc's pedagogical praxis, and traced the waves of influence which the learning generated within the process. It has traced the influence which these waves have had upon the PCN-BN

at a collective level, and at the level of the struggles for social change in which it has been involved. Our discussion has highlighted the benefits of the praxis' proximity to the social realities and struggles of the social movements which participate in it: an initiative which was created and continues to exist in order to strengthen and benefit the participating social movements in their struggles for social transformation. This proximity to struggle provides the basis for learning and knowledge processes which are highly relevant and valuable for the activists and movements involved. Our discussion has showed that the pedagogical praxis works on the basis that the participants are themselves knowing subjects who possess unique situated knowledge which emerges from their daily experience of involvement within collective struggle, and because their movements are embedded within the social realities which they seek to transform. In this way the convergence and interaction of diverse subjects of struggle within the process facilitates what can be understood as a bottom-up process of theory production, whereby a deeper understanding and analysis of the region's dynamics is facilitated. My analysis also identified the pedagogical praxis as a dynamic process of permanent learning and construction which has allowed it to adapt and evolve over time and maintain relevance. This process is driven by a dialectical relationship with the struggles of the participating social movements in which the pedagogical process strives to strengthen the social movements in their struggles, but is at the same time constantly changed through its interaction with these struggles.

The PCN-BN case study provided an example of the way that the participation of activists in the pedagogical process generates learning processes which can spur chains of learning within participating social movements, their social struggles, territories and networks. In this chapter I have demonstrated how ripple learning effects undulate in order to cascade counter-hegemonic knowledge and learning processes across temporal and geographic dimensions, allowing the pedagogical process to have an ongoing impact upon social movement struggles and praxis. Indeed, by tracing the ripple learning effects of the process we have demonstrated a hugely valuable chain of learning processes which emerge from the Nomadesc diploma course and through which the diploma course had concrete effects upon the praxis and struggles of one of southwest Colombia's most prominent social movements. I argue that the Nomadesc pedagogical process can be argued to have contributed to one of Latin America's most significant social movement uprisings of the 21st century, by creating a shift in consciousness within the PCN-BN which brought about significant changes in the organisation's organising and pedagogical praxis. Nomadesc's long term approach to working with social movements allows it to be flexible and receptive to the alternative temporalities of the movements and their struggles, facilitates the development of

strong collaborative working relationships oriented towards social action, and imbued with human bonds of solidarity. The following chapter analyses the epistemological inner workings of the pedagogical process, presenting a multi-dimensional account of the intercultural knowledge dialogue which is the foundation of the pedagogical praxis.

Chapter 6: Nomadesc's intercultural knowledge dialogue unpicked

This chapter lifts the bonnet on the pedagogical process in order to peer into the epistemological inner workings and explore the learning and knowledge processes which emerge from the intercultural knowledge dialogue that underpins it. The analysis draws out aspects of Nomadesc's praxis which emerged from our research process. The themes which are presented emerged as salient in the view of the protagonists of the process. Based upon interviews with activists who have been participants, facilitators, coordinators and allies throughout the history of the initiative, as well as my own ethnographic fieldnotes, our discussion begins by identifying the intercultural knowledge dialogue (*dialogo de saberes*) as a principal foundation of the praxis and driver of counter-hegemonic learning processes; as well as examining the different knowledges and lineages of struggle which interact within this intercultural dialogue. I analyse the learning processes which emerge from the intercultural knowledge dialogue, highlighting in particular the generation of counter-hegemonic semiotic processes. I present a discussion of social humanism, in order to understand the way in which this endogenous ideological framework is reflected in the Nomadesc praxis and shapes the intercultural knowledge dialogue.

The chapter goes on to consider the role of the cultural and emotional dimensions of knowledge within this radical pedagogical praxis, and the ways in which Nomadesc harnesses these dimensions in order to generate learning processes which increase participants' connection to themselves, each other and to their struggles for social justice. I consider the territorial aspect of the pedagogical process and the ways in which the territories of rural social movements are leveraged in order to fuel embodied processes of counter-hegemonic learning.

6.1 Intercultural knowledge dialogue



Photo 6.1: A UIP workshop demonstrating cultural diversity. Hanging from the ceiling are the symbols of the different movements which are part of the process. Credit: Patrick Kane

Something which emerged prominently from our interviews was the fundamental role of the popular education principle of ‘knowledge dialogue’ (*dialogo de saberes*) within the Nomadesc pedagogical praxis:

[we seek] to create a dialogue based on our differences, on the different knowledges, to seek solutions and learn from the interaction of different ideas and ways of thinking, different experience; so it is about recognising that the subjects arrive to the educational space with their own knowledges and practices, and that these practices and experiences are the source of the knowledges of our peoples (current leading Nomadesc member, and diploma student during early years, interview, 2018).

As demonstrated by the above citation, the coming together of different subjects, territories, knowledges, experiences and epistemologies creates an intercultural knowledge dialogue (*dialogo intercultural de saberes*) which can be understood as a process of collective knowledge construction. Knowledge dialogue is a pedagogical principle which is associated with Latin American popular education, and underpins the pedagogical approach of Paolo Freire which has been so influential with social movements across the continent (Ghiso, 1993; Leff, 2004; Argueta Villamar, 2012). The *dialogo de saberes* is based upon the mutual recognition by the subjects involved (and in particular by the educator) of each other as knowledge bearing subjects, and hence requires as a starting point the recognition of forms of knowing and being which have historically been marginalised (Leff, 2004).

Whilst some popular education approaches employ prescriptive methodological templates to design activities in order to manufacture a knowledge dialogue between participants (and facilitators), for Nomadesc and the UIP it stands more as a pedagogical principle or methodological thread which is intrinsic to the entire pedagogical approach. This dialogical character of the pedagogical approach is vital to understanding the learning and knowledge production processes which are generated when diverse subjects of struggle converge and interact within the UIP. Interviewees described how the learning environment creates a rich environment for organic and dynamic learning processes *between* the participants (who it should be remembered are representatives of social movements which belong to the process), in a dialogical process of collective learning and knowledge construction:

It's something wonderful, because you learn from your comrades, that is to say, to see how they approach their methodology for resistance and education in their community, and I would say it is interesting [to see] how others do it and how I can apply it in my own territory, it's something reciprocal...I would also tell my own experience from my territory and the teacher would listen to it...I was impacted by the way that they were working in their communities, and when I talked about what we had been experiencing in our territory, they were impacted and they would start asking me 'how is this?', 'how did you do that?', so there was feedback on our experiences and knowledges...so we were constructing [together], after we finished the class we would continue sharing, discussing and making notes... (Afro-descendent community leader and graduate of first UIP cohort, interview, 2018)

Through the intercultural knowledge dialogue, the pedagogical process facilitates the conservation, reproduction, distribution and also generation of counter-hegemonic knowledge. Such an approach requires a more horizontal relationship between facilitators and organisers of the process and the participants/students than in more traditional pedagogical approaches:

We were able to create spaces for reflection which were more horizontal, in which the protagonism was theirs (the participants) as social and political subjects, and their opinions were guiding the collective interpretations which we reached – more than a teacher I was an instigator and provocateur of debates (Activist, expert in Participatory Action Research, UIP facilitator, interview, 2018).

Diversity as an emancipatory resource

Since its inception, the philosophy of the Nomadesc pedagogical process has been based upon not just the recognition of the intercultural social subject as knowledge bearing, but also as the bearer of emancipatory potential and agency. The social subject is recognised as politically, culturally, ethnically and organisationally diverse. Within the intercultural knowledge dialogue, this diversity is converted into

a valuable movement resource which generates learning processes through the interaction between different subjects of struggle:

[some people] say that the difficulties we have in unifying the Colombian social movement is because of our cultural diversity, which doesn't allow us to unify our criteria...But we think the opposite, we believe that this is the Colombia people's biggest source of wealth...because this diversity facilitates creation and permanent activation (current leading Nomadesc member, and diploma student during early years, interview, 2018)

Within the UIP, the interaction between the knowledges and experiences of such diverse subjects as trade unionists, indigenous, black and peasant activists, students, victims' groups etc, creates a particularly potent intercultural melting pot. Hence, the UIP's conceptualisation of interculturality is a particularly political one which recognises the emancipatory potential of intercultural interaction between diverse subjects of struggle, and which is geared towards social action

There are varying notions and philosophical conceptions [of interculturality]...For Nomadesc, it has to do with respecting our differences, it means a dialogue between all in order to work together on the basis of thematic unity [in order to generate] actions aimed at resolving the issues facing communities... For others [interculturality] is simply about joining cultures but for us it is more than that, it is about understanding that... Each of these has a role to play from their own perspective, a distinctive role, and that from each of their diverse cultures and experiences they all have something to contribute to [social] transformation, without this I think it will be very difficult for pedagogical processes to achieve genuine transformations because it would always be the imposition of some upon others (Nomadesc founding member and current leading member of the organisation, interview, 2018)

The process is imbued with a deep sensitivity and receptiveness to the diverse organisational forms, experiences, histories, cultures, epistemologies and ontologies of the different social movements involved. This diversity can be understood as the multiple dimensions of the participants' humanness: including their collective and individual identities, languages, emotions, knowledge practices, struggles, experiences, traditions and histories. Within the praxis, each of these dimensions through which diversity is manifested are understood as containers of knowledge which is valuable to struggles for social change. There is a duality at work here of commonality and diversity: the participants are united by a common subaltern class position, however rather than a single, homogenous category, this is recognised as a richly diverse category.

The intercultural pedagogical space facilitates the convergence of multiple knowledges, epistemological frameworks, ontologies and lineages of struggle. These include the epistemologies of indigenous, afro-

descendant, and peasant communities; theoretical, academic and 'professional' knowledge (principally from facilitators, including both methodological and ideological); and the knowledge resulting from the experiences of struggle of the individual and collective subjects which are part of the pedagogical process. Hence the UIP can be conceived as an epistemological patchwork quilt, made up of these different knowledges, as well as the knowledge and learning which has been constructed, inter-woven and circulated over two decades of pedagogical praxis between diverse sectors of the social movement:

Our approach seeks to include, and this inclusiveness is our biggest wealth, it is fundamental...that we have a point where campesinos, indigenous and Afro-Colombian peoples meet and we say "this is our nature", this is our society", and then we can say what we want, what kind of world do we want, and we don't have to be waiting for them to tell us what kind of world they are going to build for us. (scholar-activist, facilitator on UIP, interview, 2018).

The ancestral knowledges of rural ethnic social movements and communities are harnessed alongside the 'professional' or academic knowledge, and the accumulated learning which has emerged from the pedagogical process itself. The knowledge which emerges from the daily experience of social movement struggles in the context of the armed conflict, repression and marginalisation by the Colombian state also plays a central role (Kane, ethnographic fieldnotes, 2018). Simply being part of a political-organisational process within such a context produces unique and valuable knowledge within the movements – whether that be the experience of being part of a trade union struggle in defence of higher education as in the case of Sintraunicol union, or the struggle for ethnic-territorial rights and the dignified living conditions for Afro-descendant communities as in the case of the Proceso de Comunidades Negras, for example.

Intrinsically decolonial praxis

Underlying the pedagogical process is a critical historical analysis of the structural injustices which underpin the epistemological paradigms of Western capitalist modernity. The hegemony of this paradigm in Latin America and across the globe was established through the racialised genocidal violence and oppression of colonialism, and the systematic extermination, subjugation and rendering invisible of populations, epistemologies and cultures (Santos, 2015). The Nomadesc pedagogical praxis is intrinsically decolonial in its epistemological approach, in the recognition of the co-existence of different knowledges and ways of knowing the world, and the implicit rejection of the epistemological hierarchy which has historically characterised Western modernity:

For me, hope lies in the renunciation of hegemonic Western logic...sooner or later we have to start to see ourselves as a species and as a civilisation and to recognise the need to take care of all of us, and what Western logic has inculcated in us is individualism and selfishness, it has made us believe that we can prosper as individuals and that is a lie- we will survive as a species or not at all (Activist, expert in participatory action research, UIP facilitator, interview, 2018).

Yet this rejection of the colonial hierarchy of knowledge does not imply a rejection of academic or professional knowledge associated with the knowledge institutions of Western rationality: the process has always involved facilitators educated or even employed in formal universities who are committed to working with social movements. Such facilitators share the critique of the epistemic violence reproduced historically by these institutions; and who seek to put their own knowledge to the benefit of the social movements of the UIP:

I think the failure of academia has been that it has taken too long to begin to do analysis which responds to these dynamics [of communities/social movements] ...now, we aren't going to say that we don't draw on/bring in elements from academia, we do because they are necessary and we consider them important (current leading Nomadesc member, and diploma student during early years, interview, 2018).

The aim is to remove academic or 'professional' knowledge from its pedestal in order to put it into dialogue and interaction with the other knowledges within the pedagogical space in order to create a horizontal, collective processes of knowledge construction and weaving. This means collapsing, rather than inverting the epistemological hierarchy, which opens up the possibility of the emergence of new, counter-hegemonic semiotic processes through the interaction and interweaving of knowledges and experiences.

At the same time as the academic who has written 10 books can teach, so too can the campesino who has worked the land for 20 or 30 years and whilst they may not be able to read texts, they read nature and are able to explain nature and share their knowledge, I think that has been the key aspect [of the pedagogy] in recognising those knowledges and putting them into dialogue and make them equally valid as our own knowledge - we don't take academia literally – we learn from the organising processes of the movements we work with (Nomadesc founding member and currently a leading member of the organisation, 2018)

Clearly, this commitment to epistemological justice implies a huge pedagogical challenge: the colonial hierarchy of knowledge, and epistemological domination are practices which have lasted several centuries and are deeply embedded within all aspects of mainstream Colombian society, including formal education institutions, and are often reproduced unconsciously by social subjects. Being so immersed in them within

broader society, it would be almost impossible for social movements to create spaces which are completely devoid of such tendencies. For example, in the pedagogical sessions of the UIP, the facilitator of a workshop usually has academic knowledge and vocabulary. Even if the facilitator moderates their language in order to make it more accessible, there is a tendency or both facilitators and students to slip back to the traditional schemes of teacher supremacy over students, or to the participants who have a higher level of formal education:

X ended up facilitating most of today's UIP workshop. I was struck by how orthodox or traditional the pedagogy of the session was. Considering the participants were mainly teenagers, it was particularly surprising. The session had large segments of simply talking at the participants for extended periods. At one point I interjected to ask if anybody understood the term privatisation which had been used on several occasions, and most there shook their heads. (Kane, ethnographic field notes, 2018).

Being able to overcome this trend depends upon the facilitator's pedagogical capacity amongst other things to create a dynamic within the pedagogical space which seeks to empower subjects and encourage them to value their own knowledge and experience. The unstructured, free-flowing approach of the Nomadesc pedagogical process contains the possibility of more horizontal, bottom—up learning processes, but also carries the risk of reverting back to the very tendencies which the process seeks to overcome.

At the same time, with the haste to dismantle the hierarchy of knowledge and redress historical injustices, there also exists the temptation to fall into romanticism or the reification of ancestral knowledge, without submitting them to dialogical questioning and critically evaluating them in the process:

One thing that is striking within the pedagogical space is the frequency of references to ancestral knowledge and to all things ancestral. Whilst generally I think there is a clarity amongst senior activists and facilitators over what they mean by this, I get the sense that for some participants the term ancestral knowledge is more of a vague reference to a time gone by when things were better, and from which knowledge is static and permanently valid... (Kane, ethnographic fieldnotes, 2018)

This tendency is perhaps understandable from the perspective of epistemological justice, given the depth of historical effects related to epistemicide and the need to recover and preserve surviving ancestral knowledge. These tensions demonstrate the difficulty of building a process based on principles of epistemological justice, in a broader context of continuing epistemological injustice

Counter-hegemonic semiotic processes

In the previous chapter we saw how the coming together of diverse subjects from territories across the region facilitates Nomadesc and the social movements it works with to maintain an up-to-date analysis of the regional context. Yet the knowledge and learning generated through the intercultural knowledge dialogue within the pedagogical process is not limited to providing a more profound understanding of the context. It also produces new meanings. How can we understand the collective semiotic processes which occur within the pedagogical process itself as a result of this interaction between the diverse subjects with their different epistemologies and knowledges? In what ways have these different forms of understanding the world and accumulated learning experiences forged through struggle and organising been interweaved together, transformed and drawn upon throughout the history of the process?

In bringing together, interweaving and constructing knowledges and ideas, I have argued that the pedagogical process can be understood as an epistemological patchwork quilt. The intercultural interaction which occurs within the pedagogical space generates counter-hegemonic semiotic processes, which in turn influence the semiotic processes of the collective subjects involved, and hence impact upon their own organising praxis. That is to say, the counter-hegemonic semiotic processes which are generated within the intercultural dialogue end up having material results at the collective level upon the subjects and their social struggles.

This is not to suggest that Nomadesc and the organisations participating in the pedagogical process have invented a new language fathomable only unto themselves. Rather, conceptual constructions, knowledge, and ways of understanding and articulating social phenomena, developed in the midst of social struggles in order to articulate demands and guide social action, are (re)produced and circulated within a discursive repertoire for the cultivation of common meanings and collective ways of understanding the world. These counter-hegemonic semiotic processes are particularly valuable and pertinent for the social movements because they emerge from praxis and at the same time are oriented towards praxis. That is to say, they arise from the direct action and experience of activists, and are harnessed in order to improve and strengthen the praxis of social movements in their struggles. In this sense, the pedagogical praxis employed by Nomadesc can be understood as a collective mode of wisdom, the accumulation of participants' varied experiences of struggle. This not only endows the process with legitimacy but also makes it a valuable collective resource that emerges from the movement and has been nourished over time with new concepts, realities and experiences.

I was struck during today's session of the UIP of the ways in which certain terms or concepts gain traction within the process (and more broadly within Nomadesc's work). For example, the notion of the community plan de vida (life plan), which within the discourse of the UIP represents a method for community planning as well as a rhetorical divide for referring to the need for communities to act in accordance with their long-term strategic aims. When I left Colombia in 2010, life plan was not something which was heard of or discussed within the diploma programme. Yet with the beginning of the UIP, life plan had become almost ubiquitous in its use by Nomadesc and the social movements, with huge reference to, and almost universal acceptance of the pertinence of it for all the social movements. Life plans emerged from indigenous communities/movements and have been broadly adopted within the wider social movement in Colombia. (Kane, ethnographic fieldnotes, September 2017)

The point here is not to engage in a discussion of the merits of life plans as a means of holistic strategic planning for social movements. Rather, it is about the way that a particular concept- in this case a methodological tool- emerges from a particular constituency of the pedagogical process, and is subsequently adopted, reproduced and circulated to the other movements. Here we can grasp the dynamic nature of the initiative's rich conceptual and discursive repertoire, and appreciate how it has been driven by the dialectic which exists between the social struggles in the region and the changing conjunctures that constantly require adaptation, continuously altering the praxis of social movement and generating learning processes and new counter-hegemonic knowledge in the process. That is, the conceptual and discursive constructions that are part of the patchwork quilt of the UIP today are not simply those which have been accumulated throughout the two decades of the process: along the way, new ways of understanding have been cultivated, new concepts, whilst others have lost their explanatory power or relevance, being rejected or replaced. Crucially, the constant (re)production of this vocabulary/repertoire reflects a shift from the early years of the initiative as a top-down educational process that diffused knowledge products to participants, to a more bottom-up and dialogical process in which teachers and learners, old and young, leaders and activists engage in a collective process of meaning making that transforms both participants and organisers in new, exciting and innovative ways.

Upsurges in mobilisation as drivers of learning

One element which emerged within the systematisation process was the way in which upsurges in social mobilisation trigger upsurges in learning amongst social movements, and the way in which the Nomadesc pedagogical initiative seeks to harness, recycle and circulate the knowledge produced through these processes. Social struggles such as the 2008 Minga of Social and Community Resistance; the fight against the privatisation of the state utilities company EMCALI; and the 2017 Buenaventura civic strike were

identified by interviewees as examples of large scale, extended mobilisation processes involving collaboration between diverse sectors and movements. Each had a demonstrable knock-on impact on other organisational processes and social struggles in the southwestern region and arguably also at national level in Colombia. Nomadesc and other organisations involved in the pedagogical process actively participated in each of the three processes mentioned, and as stated above, these processes served as rich learning experiences.



Photo 6.2: An indigenous mobilisation in rural Cauca, 2009 Credit: Patrick Kane

Such multi-sectoral mobilisation processes, where different individual and collective subjects converge with a common objective in search of social transformations, are prolific generators of knowledge, conceptual constructions, and strategies for social action, often with high levels of creativity and originality. For example, during the Minga in 2008 the social movements involved a methodological-pedagogical philosophy which guided collective action, summed up by the slogan '*caminando la palabra*' (walking the word). When faced with President Uribe's refusal to meet with them in Cauca, the protesting communities and social movements decided to march to the capital Bogotá, moving from town to town along the way and staging public meetings in order to dialogue with locals and exchange experiences, discuss the problems they faced, and call for a collective effort to construct solutions. This process of 'walking the word' involved being physically present, and generating face to face, public encounters and exchanges with local populations in towns as the Minga moved in convoy towards Bogota. This was an uncomplex methodology which generated deeply transformative embodied learning processes for those

involved, as they broke down boundaries and generated spaces of public participation in a country in which such spaces have for so long been violently denied. Hence the phrase ‘caminar la palabra’ came to evoke this transformative learning process, along with memories of the historic struggle of 2008 and the experience of bottom-up political participation and construction.

The Minga left an important legacy in the praxis of many social movements in the southwest and across the country as an attempt to bring together different and diverse sectors and movements to collectively build towards alternative solutions and models through dialogue. It also showed the benefit of collective learning through broad, horizontal interchange and physical presence. It had an important impact upon Nomadesc’s pedagogical praxis (not least in the increased emphasis on territorial visits – *recorridos territoriales* – see p139), which in turn has had influence within the movements and organisations that participate (Kane, ethnographic fieldnotes, 2018). The notion of ‘walking the word’ has similarities to the thinking of the Zapatista movement in Mexico and its mantra ‘asking we walk’ (Holloway, 2005). The two are prefigurative forms of organisation that do not claim to have all the solutions and answers, but rather seek to build in a democratic, horizontal and participatory manner, across/between different social sectors.

Here, the point I would like to highlight is the key role that the pedagogical process plays in harnessing the learning and semiotic processes that occur during upsurges in social mobilisation such that these nourish the learning of participants within the pedagogical process, and hence serve to strengthen the social movements which they represent. This can be understood as a kind of cross-pollination learning process. It is a role which seeks not only to contribute to the collective memory of the social movements of the region and keep alive the learning of their struggles and the new conceptual and discursive constructions in which they participate, but also to feed them into the knowledge dialogue which takes place within the pedagogical process; and thus to collectivise and put them at the service of the struggles of other processes and other movements, generating new counter-hegemonic learning processes.

Paradigm shift

Also important in driving the continuous evolution and adaptation of knowledge production processes has been the continuous demographic and geographical expansion of the process to include more social movements and territories, bringing with them their own concepts and ideas which are in turn woven into the process. At the beginning of the process, when the majority participation was that of trade unions, the epistemological paradigm was heavily influenced by theoretical-academic thinking related to Western

rationality, underpinned by the ideological framework of social humanism (social humanism is discussed further below, but it is relevant to point out here that it emerged from critical elements within the Colombian academy, which has historically been highly influenced by Western rationality and epistemologies); and from various strands of Marxist revolutionary theory. This is not to say that those schemes were the only ones influencing the process in those early years, but rather that they provided a paradigm which was predominant thanks to the political and ideological character of the trade union movement, the political and academic experience of the protagonists, and the political conjunctures of the time.

Interviewees identified an epistemological paradigm shift which occurred around the mid-point of the 2000s. It was brought about by the increased participation of indigenous and Afro-Colombian sectors in the pedagogical process. As the participation of these sectors began to increase due to the shifting dynamics in the region, a process of epistemological transformation began to occur within the process:

It was difficult for many of us at the beginning, or for me particularly, the break that we see very clearly today at the time it was very blurred, very tangled because we were so rooted in Western thought ... epistemologically for me it was very complicated... (trade unionist who has been involved in design and delivery of the process since early phase of diplomas until present day, interview, 2018)

As a result of the change in demographics, the pedagogical praxis was increasingly influenced by the epistemological paradigms and social practices of these ancestral ethnic groups. Beyond the question of epistemological justice, the shift was also based on Nomadesc's recognition that these sectors and movements were leading some of the most important social struggles in the country and hence were being heavily targeted for violence by the state and its paramilitary allies. In line with Nomadesc's holistic approach to human rights defence, the increased involvement of these sectors in the pedagogical process were part of broader strategic approaches to working with these movements which included Nomadesc providing socio-legal advice and support and human rights accompaniment to the movements. During this period there was also a recognition on the part of other sectors of Colombian social movements that rather than simply standing in solidarity with indigenous and black movements, their own emancipation was not possible without the emancipation of these ethnic minorities and the historical reparation of the historical injustices they have suffered.

Social humanism

Social movements (and their pedagogical processes) do not emerge from a political and ideological vacuum. Nomadesc, and the pedagogical process, is influenced by the ideological and political lineages and struggles of Colombia's social movements. Our discussion of the intercultural knowledge dialogue would be incomplete without reference to the ideological lineage which has underpinned Nomadesc's praxis since its inception.

Social humanism is an endogenous ideological framework which has found its definition as much in the praxis and organising of Colombian social movements as it has in academic pages. It emerged in Colombia during the 1960s, and is particularly associated with three radical intellectuals who had an explicit commitment to social change and social justice, and would go down as some of Colombia's most prominent thinkers: Eduardo Umaña Luna, Orlando Fals Borda and Camilo Torres Restrepo. Torres Restrepo in particular remains a revered, symbolic figure in Colombia - a Catholic priest, prolific sociologist and revolutionary activist who would eventually go on to join the ELN guerrilla and subsequently be killed in combat in 1966. Torres Restrepo's thought left a huge legacy in each of the realms to which he dedicated his life: within academia, where his sociological work began to question 'imported' Western epistemological paradigms and is credited with influencing the emergence of Participatory Action Research methodological approach (Fals Borda, 2006); within the Catholic Church, where he was an important influence upon the emergence of the liberation theology tendency; and within Colombian movements struggling for social change. Arguably his most significant legacy was upon Colombian social movements, where his thought would become integral to social humanism - one of the country's most influential political-ideological tendencies.

[You could understand social humanism as] an ecosystem of ideas shaped ... in the 60s by several basic problems - the problem of what to do with Marxism and with socialism and its inability ... to see the stories from below, the history from below but also its inability to see beyond the structure, then a series of theories emerge [in Colombia], because [Eduardo Umaña Luna] comes from the discipline of law, and Orlando Fals Borda comes from the world of sociology and Camilo [Torres] also with strong influence of theology, so let's say it was an ecosystem of people concerned about social change and social justice who came together, but also aware that much of the deficiency of social struggles in Colombia had been the failure to propose a strong and solid alternative paradigm based on our reality... so that spurred them to seek to generate ideas on how to understand that reality. (scholar-activist, facilitator on the UIP, interview, 2018)

Social humanism emerged from a critique of orthodox Marxism and its inadequacy for the specificities of the Colombian context. Torres, Fals Borda and Luna, from their different academic disciplinary perspectives, sought new ways of understanding the specific social realities of Colombia which could be useful to the praxis of those engaged in struggles for revolutionary social change and against capitalism and imperialism in Colombia and beyond.

Whilst retaining a class-based structural analysis of the functioning of Colombian society within a broader imperialist system dominated by the US, a crucial difference within their thinking pertained to the understanding of the character of the revolutionary subject, and the relationship between structure and agency. Social humanism emphasises human agency - which implies the possibility of human subjects acting upon reality in order to transform it: that is, a framework based upon a recognition that people are bearers of emancipatory and transformative capacity. But more than simply recognising human agency, social humanism also brings the human subject into the focus of analysis:

to give a superior focus, or an epistemological pre-eminence to the human subject, to their agency, but also their humanness, their emotions, the things we share...(ibid)

To bring the human subject into focus implicitly means recognising her as knowledge-bearing. Unlike humanist theories which tend to isolate the human from their social context and relationships with other humans and the physical world, *social* humanism seeks to bring these relationships and contexts into the lens of analysis with a *relational* understanding of the subject:

Social humanism comes from modernist roots...you could ask, does this not fall into being individualism and liberalism? This is where the social comes in, it is where another philosophical dimension emerges which is to focus upon the human being but in relation with the other: that is, you can't understand the human subject outside of its relation with the other which means that you have to read the cultural relationships, but also the relationships with nature and territory...(ibid)

Social humanists posit a revolutionary subject which is diverse, multi-ethnic, relational, and sentient. Torres Restrepo argued that the term 'working class' was too narrow for the Colombian context, particularly because of its exclusion of rural movements, a significant constituency in Colombia. Instead he preferred the term 'popular class':

With the term popular class I refer to the poor in Colombia. From a strictly sociological point of view I understand that this is a quite vague term, but it is the term which the people understand...[I use it] to not refer only to the workers, but also to the peasants (Torres, quoted in Korol et al, 2010:p99)

This recognition of the diverse, knowledge-bearing character of the human subject, holds important implications for revolutionary praxis. It also marks an important distinction with economistic Marxist approaches which tend to view subjects primarily in terms of their relations of production: social humanism perceives revolutionary potential within the cultural, political and social diversity of the 'popular' class. This means a praxis which recognises and harnesses this diversity, whilst holding onto a broader class analysis. A particular concern for Torres Restrepo was the importance of building class unity across the diversity of social movements in Colombia. He was critical of the tendency of left-wing forces to allow ideological differences to divide them, and argued that such differences must be put aside for the sake of the revolution (Torres, 1965). This pluralist drive for unity runs throughout Nomadesc's praxis.

Here we can grasp the foundational influence of social humanism throughout all of Nomadesc's praxis. This is evident in the concern for the micro-level essence of the movements and organisations (in other words, the sensitivity to the social realities, relationships and cultures of the subjects which they work with: the human building blocks); combined with the macro-level concern for structural causes of class-based injustice and oppression. Nowhere is this more evident than in the praxis of the UIP:

I think the UIP is a good example of social humanism in practice, because it generates a practice of exchange between communities which think as collectives...but which also develop a critical analysis of the systems from the perspective of the social struggles and the trajectories of their communities. These aren't anonymous communities, but communities made up of people who think, who feel, who have expectations...and these ways of thinking, these cosmovisions can't be understood in isolation from a specific place, from a set of social relations, from a territory, and this is why you see in the UIP there is music, they talk about territory, there are seeds, they do the mandala....because there is this frame of social understanding and they understand that communities are made up of and move because of people, and people are the focus...it isn't simply the land for the sake of the land, or the air for the sake of the air, or opposition for the sake of opposition, it is also about living culturally, socially, humanly...(Activist involved in early years of the diploma programme working as part of the Nomadesc team, interview, 2018)

Another aspect of social humanist thought which is reflected within Nomadesc's praxis is the principle that the role of the intellectual in working with subaltern movements is one of collaborator rather than leader, yet playing an important role in the generation of consciousness amongst the oppressed:

Us academics and intellectuals nevertheless have something to contribute to the masses. Not as chiefs, but rather as collaborators, we must give a national consciousness that unifies the non-conformism of the popular classes. As well as common consciousness, we can stimulate the values that exist in our people, so long as we trust in the people. Our peoples have lived conditions of inferiority, they have been

frustrated many times by circumstances, by leaders and by the system. They are fatalists and do not trust in the result of individual or collective action. We must rebuild the trust that the people must have in itself....in this way, our people will acquire an active attitude towards its own problems, an indispensable condition to be able to resolve them for themselves. (ibid: p66)

It is through a consideration of social humanism that we can gain an appreciation of how the paradigm shift described above came about within the Nomadesc pedagogical process. Whilst Torres Restrepo and Fals Borda were early forerunners of critiques of the West's epistemological domination, to read their writings from the 1960s and 70s today there is a sense that they were still operating within the paradigm which they criticised (Torres, 1964; Fals Borda, 1970). Yet the openness of their thinking around theory and praxis would lay the basis for a praxis which decades later could embrace these cultures to a degree which would have been unthinkable to Torres Restrepo back in the 1960s. Social humanism's conception of the transformational capacity contained within diverse subaltern knowledges and cultures, its receptivity to subjective dimensions of the human experience, and its dialogical methodology, have enabled adherents of social humanism amongst Colombian social movements to embrace the culture, knowledge and organisational forms of rural indigenous, black and peasant movements over recent decades. This shift has also been brought about by the emergence of these movements at the vanguard of subaltern resistance in Colombia, whilst more traditional resistance institutions such as trade unions and guerrilla movements have been weakened as a result of decades of being targeted by heavy repression and violence. The interaction with alternative epistemological and conceptual frameworks has hence had a transformative impact for some proponents of social humanism, and transformed the culture and praxis of some proponents of social humanism, including Nomadesc and the UIP. Social humanism's centring of the human subject, which is at the same time understood as a *collective being*, provided the ideal basis for an activist praxis which could open itself up to the epistemologies and cultures of the social movements involved.

It is important to underline that the paradigm shift which has taken place within the pedagogical process does not signify the replacement of the social humanist framework- which remains very much at the heart of Nomadesc's praxis-, but rather a type of pluralist ideological weaving process which, through the intercultural knowledge dialogue, is able to draw upon multiple epistemological/ideological frameworks and approaches to praxis.

Within Colombian social movements, social humanism and liberation theology have historically been close cousins, linked by the inspirational figure of Camilo Torres Restrepo. Torres Restrepo argued that

revolution is not only permitted for Christians, but is also 'obligatory' (Torres, 1965a:p45). He emphasised the importance of love within revolutionary praxis, developing the notion of 'efficient love', which goes beyond charity-based generosity which benefit (which fails to challenge the structures of injustice), to seek transformative change for all of the oppressed (ibid). From the 1960s onwards, liberation theology has inspired many Catholics to join the struggle for social change in Colombia, and continues to be an important theological influence not only within Colombian social movements but also within some ecumenical circles. It has been an important influence upon Nomadesc's praxis.

An expansive conception of human rights

The conceptual framework of human rights has been one of the most important pillars which has underpinned the pedagogical process. Human rights has been central throughout its history, and has served as a conceptual foundation upon which new semiotic processes have occurred. In the following discussion we seek to unpack the critical way in which the concept of human rights is understood and articulated within the process; the way in which the concept of human rights is harnessed within the praxis, and how Nomadesc's praxis has expanded its focus beyond orthodox human rights.

The educational process was founded on the basis of the urgent need to protect human life in the context of a violent paramilitary onslaught against social movements in the late 1990s. The intention during those early years was to provide tools which could help social movements to counter the violence and its impact on organisational processes and social struggles (a need that has been constant in the context of southwestern Colombia). From the inception of the pedagogical process, the discourse of human rights has been an important tool which allows activists to articulate the reality being experienced by communities and movements, and to act upon this reality in contexts of extreme violence and state terrorism. But the conceptualisation of human rights that has been developed within the work of Nomadesc, and in the pedagogical process itself, goes beyond the institutional framework of international civil and political rights treaties, and the economic, social, cultural and environmental rights associated with liberal democracies to include the Algiers Charter of the Rights of Peoples. It is a conceptualisation which is particular to the Colombian context, and which must be understood in relation to an understanding of social humanism, as set out elsewhere in this thesis.

Put into practice, this expanded framework means a radical praxis of human rights defence that is closely linked to struggles for social justice; which is receptive to and rooted in the reality of peoples and

communities, their cultures, stories, knowledge and experiences; and which seeks to empower the social subjects with whom it works, through the generation of critical consciousness:

It wasn't only about studying the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but about also building towards the construction of the Rights of Peoples...and not just about how many articles you could learn but also that people understand that their rights goes far beyond what national and international institutions and treaties have made acceptable, because people [as collectives] also have a series of rights, for example there are rights of rebellion, people are allowed to be critical. (Trade unionist intellectual involved during early years of pedagogical process, interview, 2018)

Unlike the paternalistic praxis which is often associated with human rights organisations, Nomadesc's praxis, and the pedagogical process, implies strengthening social movements in their organising and empowering them to demand their own rights; to formulate, articulate, and strengthen their demands upon state institutions, and to generate actions and mobilisations aimed at ensuring their enforceability:

Because [in my organisation before] we were doing a process more as a kind of solidarity initiative that really wasn't human rights defence, I realised that the defence of the rights of the community we were working with meant to support them to demand the rights that they were being denied, instead of just going and accompanying them and helping out, giving solidarity, [the diploma] was one of the things that allowed me to then go back to our collective and create this discussion, to say really we aren't defending the rights of these children, we are just helping the government, which doesn't give them education, doesn't give them food, housing, do they?...I came to understand that the issue of rights is the responsibility of the government, they signed the international treaties and they are the ones who weren't fulfilling their duties (current leading Nomadesc member, and diploma student during early years, interview, 2018).

In terms of the way it has been constructed within the pedagogical process, the figure of human rights can be considered more of a means than an end: that is, the fulfilment of internationally recognised human rights is not a utopia imagined by the actors which belong to the process. Within the pedagogical process and Nomadesc's work with communities, the discourse of human rights can be understood as a strategic discursive tool used to articulate demands upon state institutions, and to mobilise communities and generate support around those demands. This tool has on the one hand been defensive- put into practice within the repressive context of the Colombian southwest, providing knowledge that throughout the history of the pedagogical process has been key for the social movements involved. Thanks to their participation, this knowledge has been used by many of the subjects who have participated in the pedagogical process to defend their community in situations of human rights violations committed by armed actors. A central element of Nomadesc's human rights work involves drawing upon the

international human rights architecture in order to seek justice and protect human rights by leveraging pressure upon the Colombian state. This includes pursuing legal action at the Inter-American Human Rights Commission or other international human rights fora, as well as advocacy and coordination with multilateral human rights institutions such as OHCHR and international NGOs such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

On the other hand, the figure of human rights has been an offensive tool with which social movements have formulated and articulated their demands vis-à-vis state institutions in pursuit of making gains and bringing about change within their communities and territories, particularly during moments of mobilisation.

The praxis described above, based on a sensitivity towards the particularities, experiences, epistemologies and cultures of the movements and communities with which Nomadesc works, has meant that the work with the different and varied social sectors which are part of the pedagogical process has transformed the praxis along the way, creating new semiotic processes. The constant changes in conjuncture, the evolution of the pedagogy, and increase in the participation of indigenous, peasant and Afro-descendant subjects with alternative epistemologies, have influenced and shaped the semiotic processes and conceptual constructions of the pedagogical process, as discussed earlier in this chapter. The figure of human rights, and in particular of the rights of peoples, continue to be prominent pillars within the pedagogical process, but other conceptual constructions linked to the sectors that are part of the process, their cultures, experiences and struggles, have also risen to prominence.

This pragmatic, strategic approach to human rights by social movements in the Global South can be traced back to the rise of authoritarian regimes throughout Latin America in the second half of the 21st century. Across the region, emancipatory movements found themselves under attack, and in the modernist human rights discourse and framework found a way of articulating their situation to the world, as well as a means of reaching out to international legislative instruments in situations where domestic state institutions are complicit in state crimes. In describing that Zapatista movement's deployment of the discourse of human rights in denouncing the violence suffered at the hands of state forces, Speed & Solano argue that the Zapatistas' strategic adoption of the 'universal moral grammar' of human rights allowed the movement to describe in globally recognised terms the repression they face, as well as to articulate their human rights-related demands in such terms, and hence to increase political pressure upon governments and security forces (Speed & Solano, 2008). When adopted in such a strategic way, they argue, human rights

cannot be understood as a 'homogenising imposition', but rather should be seen as a '*local prism generating a rainbow of discourses and practices*' (Speed & Solano, 2008:p97). That is to say, social movements are not passive recipients of the discourse of human rights, but rather strategic agents who are able to draw upon the 'modernist' concept of human rights (and all of the problematic 'baggage' which it brings), without renouncing a broader critique of the liberal roots of the human rights framework.

Nomadesc's engagement of the human rights framework is rooted in a critique of the individualised liberal conception of human rights which predominates within bourgeois democracies. This critique is reflected in Nomadesc's adoption of the collective human rights framework of the Algiers Declaration. This collective conceptualisation of human rights is commonly held amongst Colombian social movements, and gives rise to the notion of social movements and communities as 'collective subjects' of rights. Therefore the key to this critique of the human rights framework, and the adoption of alternative conceptualisations of human rights, lies in the question of the understanding of the concept of 'human' which underlies such a framework. Angela Davis argues:

human rights can also be constructed more broadly. The ideal subject of human rights does not have to be imagined as the affluent white man. What if the ideal subject were women of colour as a collective project? If the human subject is collectivised and is imagined in enduring interaction with subjects that are not necessarily 'human' – that is, other inhabitants of our planet– the call to defend 'human rights' might also entail the need to transform systems and structures that militate against the very future of living beings and their environments. (Davis et al, 2019: p211)

6.2 Engaging the cultural, emotional and embodied dimensions of knowledge

It is important to delve deeper here in order to understand the different dimensions of knowledge which are opened up and harnessed within the intercultural pedagogical praxis of the UIP. In recognising the validity and potential of alternative forms of knowledge, the praxis demonstrates an understanding of the cultural and subjective dimensions of human knowledge as important strategic resources which sustain social struggles and are vital sources of resistance. The following discussion also analyses the learning processes which emerge from the praxis as a result of the engagement with different dimensions of knowledge.

Culture as a resource for resistance



Photo 6.3: Indigenous communities boarding a chiva bus during a mobilisation, 2009. Credit: Patrick Kane

Central to Nomadesc's praxis is an understanding of culture as a key element for any process of collective resistance, as well as being central to the sustenance of social struggles in the face of political violence which has so plagued the Colombia throughout its history:

Culture underlies all communities, peoples and sectors, it is part of their philosophy and it goes beyond the traditional dance etc., culture is also the way they see the world and it brings with it an identity which allows them to be different. So for example, indigenous culture which hasn't lost its own language have a very different way of seeing the world to Western modes of seeing the world, because the ways that they communicate with each other and with nature is completely different from the imposition of a [European language], be it English, Spanish or French, which happened with colonisation. Sometimes people think it is a cliché to keep talking about that, but there is part of the essence of what we are. Where did the black communities arrive from? What was their culture? How did they live? What was their language? Why were they forced to come to another continent? Who resisted? That is part of their culture too, and how that culture of resistance from those particularly violent periods has to do precisely with a strong culture of resistance, and this culture of resistance is based on a philosophy and concepts which are part of the character of each of these communities. [Culture includes] the issue of protecting territory, for example the indigenous guards

or the maroon guards⁸, these are part of a culture of organised community work, in minga to defend a territory. When we talk about interculturality it is about identifying the diversity of these cultures that exist in the territories and seeing each of them as complementary, and as part of our wealth, not as cultures which have to impose themselves over others...in Colombia, part of the resistance during the really violent periods has been culture, a very strong culture of resistance... (Nomadesc founding member and currently a leading member of the organisation, interview, 2018)

This understanding is reflected within the pedagogical praxis in the way that the cultures of the movements involved are celebrated, dialogued and exchanged:

Today was the UIP's annual assembly...Something that is ever-present in Nomadesc's activities is subaltern culture and art. Any public event organised by Nomadesc will usually begin with music and dance- including folk anthems of the different social movements, poetry, folk dance- they are such joyful events. Today's event began with what seemed like almost an hour of different cultural performances. These were highly participative, with attendees all standing up, singing, clapping, dancing. It serves to create a huge level of joyful energy in the room, and a strong sense of connection between participants. The event began with several political chants of solidarity with political prisoners and in memory of martyrs of the struggle. There were further cultural performances after lunch and at the end of the day. (Kane, ethnographic fieldnotes, 2018)

Clearly, we are concerned here with a much broader conception of culture than the way that such artistic expressions are harnessed within Nomadesc's activities. Nonetheless, these manifestations of the counter-hegemonic cultures of the diverse movements of the UIP play a vital role in the development of human bonds and in creating a sense of common purpose and inter-connected struggle within Nomadesc's intercultural activities. The embrace of the diverse cultures of the participating movements has included actively engaging with the spiritualities and cosmovisions of the different movements in order to harness these cultural beliefs within the pedagogical process, and to create mutual understanding between participants. To understand this process, it is important to introduce a key element of Nomadesc's pedagogical praxis here.

⁸ These civilian guard initiatives involve unarmed community patrols by indigenous or Afro-Colombian members. In rural territories affected by armed conflict they have proved a highly effective non-violent security strategy. For further reading see Chaves et al, 2018

The role of mística

To understand the learning processes at play here I present a discussion of a concept which arises from social movements in Latin America, and which is still little known in western literature: the practice of *mística*. In relation to social movement praxis, *mística* is a term which has been used to refer to the '*abstract, emotional element, strengthened in collectivist movements, which can be described as the feeling of empowerment, love, and solidarity that serves as a mobilising force by inspiring self-sacrifice, humility, and courage*' (Issa, 2016: p125). Thus understood, *mística* is a fundamental factor for the sustenance and reproduction of social struggle, since it generates and sustains hope in contexts where social movements are often in conflict with hegemonic political, economic and social forces. The *praxis of mística* is any practice which seeks to generate the feeling of *mística* and the emotions which accompany it, often involving '*representation of the reality of social movements through word, art, symbolism, and music*' (ibid). The praxis of *mística* should serve to make subjects feel connected - with themselves, with their peers, and with the struggle of their movements. It has been argued that the praxis of *mística* has its roots within liberation theology (ibid), however in many cases (such as that of Nomadesc), the praxis is strongly influenced by the diverse cultures of varied social movements.

Within the Nomadesc intercultural pedagogical process (and in fact any activity organised by Nomadesc), throughout its history there has been an emphasis on the praxis of *mística*. Any activity - be it forum, workshop, meeting, usually contains elements of praxis which invoke and celebrate the identity and historical memory of the social movements of the region music, dance, word and symbology are used to invoke and deepen the feeling of *mística*. This usually takes place at the beginning of any activity, and is used in order to connect participants with each other's struggles, and to identify the task or activity in hand- for example a meeting or a workshop- with the broader struggles for social change and the sacrifices of martyrs (Kane, ethnographical fieldnotes, 2018). The praxis of *mística* within the pedagogical praxis also serves to collectively remember the deceased and hence to emphasise to participants that the struggles of today are built upon the struggles of those who are no longer here and in many cases who lost their lives as a result of their activism.

Within the intercultural process of the pedagogical process of Nomadesc, the praxis of *mística* is one of the main tools employed in order to generate a sense of collective identity. When *mística* is practiced within an intercultural pedagogical process, the learning which occurs in terms of the generation and strengthening of identity takes on another dimension. These aspects are used to integrate the group and

generate feelings of affection, love and solidarity with each other and with their different struggles. Hence, within the UIP process, a feeling of belonging is generated which includes but goes beyond identifying with the UIP as a pedagogical institution: it is about students strengthening their political identity and recognising themselves as empowered political subjects that are part of a larger movement that goes beyond the community or movement they represent, in a counter-hegemonic struggle, through their interaction with other political subjects involved in social struggle, and coming to appreciate their innate connections.



Photo 6.4: Members of the Association of Women and Men of Triana victims' group participating in Nomadesc's annual women's forum in 2017. Credit: Patrick Kane

Harnessing ancestral knowledge for identity-related learning processes

Colombian society - beginning with its institutions of cultural hegemony such as the mainstream media and the education system - is characterised by a structural racism against indigenous and Afro-descendent ethnic minorities which is a legacy of colonialism (González, 2011). This structural racism is manifested in their disproportionate suffering of socio-economic hardship and human rights violations, under-representation in mainstream society, and subjugation, essentialisation and denigration of ancestral ethnic cultures. At the same time, alternative political identities opposed to the dominant sectors are routinely stigmatised, marginalised and repressed. In such a context, a radical pedagogical process which creates intercultural dialogue based on the mutual recognition and valuing of cultural identities, and based on the belief in the emancipatory potential contained within this diversity, has an important role to play in terms

of strengthening individual and collective identities. It is a praxis based on an analysis that an emancipatory pedagogical initiative must begin by recovering, repairing, strengthening and (re)valuing that which has been so violently subjugated for centuries:

You can't build anything if don't know who you are...that's why the Quimbayas, who are an indigenous people who I cite a lot, they laugh at us when we say that the future is what we have in front of us - [they say] when we know what we were, then know what we are now, and knowing what we were and are now then we can say what we are going to do, but whilst we don't know that, we can't know what to do...We must build our own thought, and we can only do that to the extent that the peoples know their history and their culture...I think that there can't be a revolution without that...and I think the great value of this [pedagogical] process is therein- it sounds ugly but is in constructing the subjects of the revolutionary processes...and those subjects have to be historical subjects, subjects who know, cultural subjects which know where they come from...subjects in relation with the environment and nature and who know how to organise in order to build a new world...(scholar-activist, facilitator on UIP, interview, 2018).

Interviewees particularly emphasised the importance of the ancestral knowledges of indigenous, Afro-descendent and peasant cultures within the pedagogical process following the paradigm shift referred to above. Several participants referred to the UIP as being engaged in recovering and harnessing ancestral knowledge - a task seen as imperative due to the impact of centuries of oppression erasing and weakening these counter-hegemonic knowledges:

It isn't correct to say that we know everything, of course we don't know everything, there are many things that we are only just beginning to know, but if I take these elements [of knowledge] away from somebody then I leave them exposed, and if I take them away from a whole people, then I leave a whole people exposed, and I think that's what the invaders and colonisers have done - take away those elements, so it is up to us to recover our history, recover the culture (scholar-activist, facilitator on UIP, interview, 2018).

This ancestral knowledge is understood within the pedagogical process as that which has been preserved within communities down over the decades and centuries, transmitted from generation to generation usually within the oral traditions of communities. These ancestral knowledges are rooted in the alternative epistemologies of indigenous and Afro-Colombian social movements with their distinct understandings of human relations.⁹ (Kane, ethnographic fieldnotes, 2018). The intercultural learning

⁹ Space does not permit a fuller discussion of these epistemological frameworks, however the discussion on page 200 provides a window into them. For further reading see Escobar, 2020.

space within the pedagogical process facilitates the mutual learning and exchange between these multiple lineages of struggle.

A dynamic understanding of culture and identity

It is clear from the citation and its reference to the requirement to ‘build our own thought’ that this is not a romantic desire to replicate the ways of living of distant ancestors, nor to view these cultures as unchanging phenomena. Rather, such a pedagogical approach actually implicitly requires a dynamic view of culture and identity in order for counter-hegemonic learning processes to occur. But the logic of the process, as articulated so clearly in the above citation, is that ‘building new revolutionary subjects’ and developing ‘our own thought’ must necessarily involve interrogation by the subjects over their collective histories and identities.

The following citation shows that while cultural and ethnic differences are celebrated within the pedagogical process, and the different identities of the political subjects that make it up are strengthened, at the same time the process seeks to put these identities into dialogue and generate processes of learning, solidarity and unity among the various subjects:

the indigenous movements of today are not the same as the indigenous movements of a few years ago and nor are the peasant movements, nor is the black movement, or the urban movement the same today, so this interculturality is also a dialogue with time, with the historical identities, but also with these new identities that are forming in the heat of the struggle... that is, those identities that are formed and inter-woven, and in the university this process has a very important class component, which makes it a common identity which exists based upon the cultural differences... these differences are there and recognised but also there is a common identity of class and territorial defence that gives the interculturality a common purpose, it doesn't separate them, which is the big theoretical discussion of interculturality, it is often used to end up separating peoples, but in this case on the contrary it ends by uniting them through dialogue. (Activist, allied to UIP process, interview, 2018)

The identity-related learning processes which occur within the intercultural pedagogy can be understood as processes of ‘identification’, as described by Stuart Hall:

identification is constructed on the back of a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal, and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation. In contrast with the ‘naturalism’ of this definition, the discursive approach sees identification as a construction, a process never completed – always ‘in process’ (Hall, 1996: p16)

Such an understanding of culture and identity as dynamic, dialogical and *incomplete* processes which are also repositories of valuable subaltern knowledge practices is partly why the intercultural knowledge dialogue within the pedagogical praxis is understood to have emancipatory potential. Culture and identity are treated as living processes that are full of history and memory, but which adapt and change over time, as a result of the lived experience of social movements in their struggles. As mentioned above, a decolonial intercultural praxis such as this, which deliberately draws upon and revindicates the diverse cultural and political identities of participants, inevitably risks erring towards essentialisation of said cultures, which undoubtedly occurs on some occasions. Yet such a risk is deemed worth taking as part of the broader process of repairing what has been so damaged by centuries of subjugation. The dynamic notion of identity which underlies Nomadesc's praxis, and predominates within the pedagogical praxis, stands in contrast to the static and fixed-in-time concept which prevails within some sections of academia, as well as within many social movement organisational processes. For social movements struggling for social change, understanding culture and identity as unfinished processes also establishes them as terrains of struggle, which must be constantly defended from the influences of homogenising hegemonic cultural processes.

Two levels of identity-related learning processes

Throughout the history of the intercultural pedagogical process, an important aim has been to generate a sense of common identity, but without collapsing cultural diversities and the multiple identities that exist within the process: to generate unity between movements without seeking to homogenise them. Several interviewees alluded to the sense in which the intercultural encounter and the pedagogy of the process, served to reinforce, vindicate and deepen the diverse cultural, ethnic, and political identities of the participants. This occurs through having the opportunity to dialogue and share cultures, histories and experiences, not only to learn from others as mentioned above, but also to come to better recognise, understand and value their own identities:

...to have clarity of what we have and what our identity is to understand who our ancestors were, how they have struggled and built liberation processes in situations of slavery, feudalism, neoliberalism... (Nomadesc founding member and currently a leading member of the organisation, interview, 2018).

On one level, participation in the intercultural process, and interaction with other subjects carriers of different collective identities, works as a mirror in allowing participants to more fully appreciate and value their own identity through that encounter. Rather than emphasising their individuality, this process is very

much about the reinforcement of collective identities, involving participants who are representatives of broader collectives and hence carriers of collective identities which carry a whole history of struggle and collective endeavour:

The spaces of the intercultural university also serve as a mirror for the participants, who are involved in counter-hegemonic or alternative efforts but who may not have they have not given themselves the opportunity to recognise themselves in this condition of marginalisation, as part of broader counter-hegemonic efforts and faced with the hegemonic forces... it works as a mirror in the sense that they come to see themselves as counter-hegemonic or emancipatory subjects involved in these struggles that are part of broader struggles...(Activist expert in investigation - UIP facilitator, interview, 2018).

Aside from serving as a 'mirror' that strengthens the various identities within it, there is another level to this learning process which has to do with the formation or strengthening of identity. As a process which seeks to generate organic links and common cause between diverse sectors- links that can hopefully produce collaboration for strategic action- it is vital that it should seek to generate a sense of collective identity.

Hence, a strong element around which identity is formed is through the identification of common enemies (including the capitalist economic model, the ruling classes, paramilitary groups etc). Within the pedagogical praxis, much emphasis is placed on identifying those responsible for the situations of oppression of the various sectors and demonstrating the interconnectivity between the structural causes of those situations. This is a powerful method of forging unity in diversity: recognising the commonalities and interconnections of the situation faced, without collapsing the diversity which differentiates the movements.

Participants talked about the transformative experience of sharing the pedagogical space with activists from other territories and cultures, and how this formative interaction deepened their political consciousness. The possibility of learning first-hand about other struggles occurring in the same region and sharing histories which are ignored within the formal educational system and the mainstream media in Colombia, was something that strongly marked the experiences of the UIP graduates and had a conscientisation effect. A former facilitator on the diploma programme describes the learning process which occurred in the intercultural pedagogical space:

There is a combination of experiences which generates an understanding of the other- more than anything else- to understand the other and to know that this individual

cannot transform their reality by themselves, and that they also have a degree of consciousness: indigenous people have an ancestral accumulation of consciousness and culture, the peasantry has also accumulated consciousness and knowledge through the struggle for food sovereignty and through working the land... this combination of knowledges generates an understanding of three things: first, that alone we cannot transform this reality - we have to unite; second, that the enemy is the same, we are facing an economic globalising project; and third- that this knowledge must be collectivised beyond activists to the [benefit of the] whole movement and community. (Trade unionist involved during early years of pedagogical process, interview, 2018)

The quotation above describes a process of consciousness generation based on the encounter and interaction between the different experiences of struggle, different cultures, and different organisational forms of the subjects which belong to the process. According to this former facilitator, it is through this recognition and interaction of other struggles, or more precisely with other subjects *in struggle*, that a change in consciousness occurs, facilitated by the identification of enemies in common (the extractivist neoliberal development model; transnational corporations; paramilitary organisations and so on). Central to the process is a realisation that participants' struggles are interdependent, that is, in order to achieve social transformations, they must join forces; and that to achieve this as leaders they must also raise consciousness within their organisations and communities. It indicates that within the pedagogical process a sense of *intercultural subaltern collective identity* is formed and developed, whereby participants arrive at a deeper appreciation of their position as part of a single social class, within a class system, identified by their condition of oppression and subalternity and their varied struggles against the social forces that represent the interests of national and international socio-economic elites, as well as their being targeted by the violence of official and illicit armed forces which represent those elite interests.

Emotions change the world

Another aspect which emerged from discussions with activists was the role played by emotions and the way that they are harnessed within the pedagogical praxis. In recent years, the importance of emotions in understanding and explaining political action within the academic literature on social movements has begun to be recognised (Jasper, 2011). Most processes of political education do not simply aim to increase participants' knowledge and understanding; implicit in the term 'critical consciousness' is an aspect of increased commitment to the cause for social change on the part of the participant. That is to say – the desired outcome is that, upon obtaining an increased level of understanding of the reality of social injustices (and their structural causes), an increase will occur in the subject's commitment to act in order

to transform that reality, and hence also an increase in the capacity of action of both the individual and the collective.

There remains a lack of literature on the role of emotions within social movements and their organising processes in repressive contexts such as that of Colombia's. It stands to reason that for social movements in their organising, as with any aspect of human behaviour, the emotional, sentient dimension of human relations can strengthen or hinder their activity, facilitating or impeding the development of group cohesion, solidarity, and commitment to the cause. That is to say, the emotional resources which underpin resistance and sustain struggle can be cultivated through praxis. This issue is vital in the case of Nomadesc and the movements which are part of the pedagogical process. In the repressive context of the southwest of Colombia, social movements are confronted with strategies of the state and paramilitary groups which are designed to generate terror specifically to obstruct organising and dismantle opposition. In such a context, how can social movement pedagogical praxis increase participants' understanding of such an intimidating reality, and at the same time generate learning and knowledge processes on the emotional level which might lead to increased feelings of commitment to the cause and solidarity amongst participants?

In the case of Nomadesc, the pedagogical process could not be understood without reference to the role that emotions play, the ways in which they are harnessed within the praxis, and the learning processes which arise. These learning processes serve to generate affective bonds between participants and replenish emotional resources. Just as this decolonial praxis recognises the existence and value of alternative epistemological frameworks, so too does it recognise an inherently emotional dimension of knowledge:

There are other knowledges in the peripheries which are very relevant, and which are not rational knowledges but rather emotional knowledges...this begins with a profound distance in terms of human beings, we operate on this emotional dimension, it moves us and influences our decisions, and I think it is an important force to understand in the social movement...I think that popular knowledge is based on affective ties, and there we are talking about a different kind of knowledge, it is another self which is engaged...(Activist, expert in participatory action research, UIP facilitator, interview, 2018).

A relational, sentipensante subject and the logic of love

The previous citation provides an important window into the inner workings of the thinking which underlies Nomadesc's pedagogical praxis. The emotional realm is understood as a valid and indeed crucial

domain of knowledge which should be understood as sitting alongside the rational domain. This analysis evokes the work of Latin American scholar activists such as Orlando Fals Borda, an important theoretical/methodological influence upon Nomadesc's work, who argued for the importance of overcoming the false separation between thinking and feeling. They argue this division is a trait of the capitalist modernity epistemological paradigm and that working against it is vital in order to validate and engage with the sentient aspects of human existence. Fals Borda drew upon the concept of *sentipensar* (a portmanteau of the verb *sentir* - to feel, and *pensar* - to think) as a means of describing the need for both academics and activists to recognise and engage with the emotional dimension of knowledge. It was the contention of Fals Borda that this false separation is non-existent amongst the subaltern classes of Latin America; indeed, Fals Borda attributed the phrase to rural peasant communities in Colombia (Fals Borda, 2017).

In Nomadesc's pedagogical praxis, this means placing emphasis upon the human subject as a relational being, constituted through their social relations with others. This is an important tenet of social humanism, and perhaps the key point of congruence between social humanism and the ancestral epistemologies of Colombia's indigenous and black movements:

This is where the social comes in [to social humanism], it is where another philosophical dimension emerges which is to focus upon the human being but in relation with the other: that is, you can't understand the human subject outside of its relation with the other which means that you have to read the cultural relationships, but also the relationships with nature and territory... (scholar-activist, facilitator on the UIP, interview, 2018)

That is to say, the human subject is defined by and must be understood through their relationships to the social and physical world around them: to themselves, to other human beings, to nature, to their collective histories, and to the meta-physical realm inhabited by their ancestors. Nomadesc's intercultural praxis is based upon the belief that the quality of these relations is vital for social movement organising, and that these can be harnessed between diverse social movements in order to foster solidarity and ultimately unity. For this facilitator in the UIP, these relationships are none other than the affective ties which bind us to each other, and form the basis of collective resistance:

...and you can't understand this without the logic of love (*la logica del amor*)...people are willing to die because they love their territory...we are talking about a profound, unconditional link with life, with community, with their territory, with family, and with their ancestors...they are trying to defend their affective ties to each other and nature. (Activist, expert in participatory action research, UIP facilitator, interview, 2018).

Hence, the pedagogical praxis seeks to generate connections at an emotional level between participants based on affection, solidarity and equality. This generation of affective links at the individual level has a collective level objective of linking of the different organisational processes, territories and struggles of the participating organisations that are represented by the individual participants:

There are possibilities for cooperation and exchanges which are outside of the logic even of the university itself, so that people get to know each other in their resistance processes, and emotional bonds are created and behind these links there can be new exchanges and collaborations, new solidarity, affection, and that for me is a fabric of solidarity, the weaving is done at the emotional level, then later the head is what explains and justifies it. (Activist expert in participatory action research - UIP facilitator, interview, 2018).

A praxis of hope

When graduates from the UIP were asked in interviews about their experiences and learning within the pedagogical process, something which consistently came up was the theme of hope. Interviewees described how the pedagogical space cultivates hope through the intercultural coming together, the act of joining with people from other organisational processes, territories and cultures, and coming into contact with the hope which drives each of the struggles represented within the UIP, and by others who are also fighting for social justice. The recognition of the interconnectivity and similarity of these struggles, but also the possibility to participate in a space with other activists which a different world is openly debated and imagined, to be able to debate and collectively visualise social transformations with activists engaged in other struggles, was something which had a profound, hope-generating impact upon participants. The following quotes from former participants give a sense of this phenomenon:

...sometimes one feels alone, as if we are the only ones who are struggling... but no, in other regions and in other departments there are also people motivated and fighting for the transformation of society, and I think that the UIP becomes like a meeting place that is necessary, where we can share the experiences. (Activist peasant youth organisation, graduate of first cohort UIP, interview, 2018)

This praxis of hope is a vital tenet of the learning processes which were identified by participants in the pedagogical process. Here it is important to highlight that this hope is not generated from a situation of hopelessness: rather it is the aggregation of the hope which already underpins within the processes and struggles which the participants belong to; and also, within the subjects themselves, as individuals who are committed to the struggle for a different world. The pedagogical praxis serves to harness and multiply

this pre-existing hope, through the intercultural interaction between the diverse individual and collective subjects in struggle, and the sharing of their stories, experiences, symbols and cultures.

Implicit in this approach is the prefigurative nature of this emancipatory process, which understands the struggle against violent oppression as itself a space of hope, care, joy, creativity and love. This means that the pedagogy and human relationships which are formed within the process embody the values and changes which are desired in the future at a societal level, so that the learning process itself becomes a space for building alternative social relations in the here and now. Ana Dinerstein coined the phrase '*the art of organising hope*' for the prefigurative organising of social movements in Latin America, and a more apt phrase could not apply to Nomadesc's pedagogical praxis (Dinerstein, 2015). The ontological link here is clear that the struggle to transform reality becomes an emancipatory learning process through which the subject is themselves transformed and becomes more fully human (Freire, 2000). The intercultural pedagogical space can be understood as a place of encounter and reflection within the struggle, characterised by the prefigurative politics and the alternative and humanist values of the social movements which participate.

Beyond the pedagogical process, one inescapable reality which was prominent in interviews was the deep impact which the constant threat of violence has upon the everyday activities of social movements, and the everyday lives of activists and leaders. It affects forms of organisation, modes of communication, daily routines, organisational cultures, and even family relationships. It requires permanent precaution, and one way in which the violent and repressive context affects the work of Nomadesc is that it often forces the organisation to be reactive to the region's conjunctures and events. The changing and dynamic context also generates a permanent sense of urgency in organisation activities, which requires a high level of creativity from activists, to be able to read a situation and respond accordingly. Such fraught circumstances provide a high-pressured, stressful environment for activists.

Interviewees highlighted the importance of joy and humour in maintaining hope and hence maintaining resilience within such a context. When social movements came together to defend human rights and face down the violent paramilitary expansion in the early 2000s, meetings and other organising activities were imbued with camaraderie, bonds of friendship, humour, fun, mockery, and joy. Participants described how even in the most acute and tense moments, humour was rarely lacking: often morbid humour about the situation of danger and risk, as a way to vocalise fear and thus collectivise it, and at the same time to make light of it:

... an important element, we came together and connected, and we really made possible the fight to joy even in the midst of conflict...we knew that we were living in the midst of a terrible conflict, and when we got down to work we worked very seriously and for hours on end, but the *recocha*¹⁰ was vital. (participant, territorial workshop, Cali, 2018)

...there was chemistry, a lot of fraternity, we started celebrating birthdays together, and in December we always got together... I think that was the fundamental factor (participant, territorial workshop, Cali, 2018)

Participants described how these human connections, the closeness of the activists and the situation they were experiencing together, as well as their deep political commitment, gave a strong sense of collective empowerment:

We all believed ourselves superheroes, we weren't afraid, we were young, and we dreamed of socialism, of a different society...and it was a coincidence of life a special group emerged at the same time and came together, people from different organisations, we joined forces, and I thank life that it gave me that opportunity to be part of it (participant, territorial workshop, Cali, 2018)

Underpinning this sense of empowerment is a deep sense of collective sacrifice: a willingness of the activists to put their lives on the line for what they believe in, despite the very real risk of being killed. This sense is encapsulated by the oft-repeated slogan associated with the activist-lawyer Eduardo Umaña Mendoza, '*it's better to die for something than to live for nothing*'.¹¹

A territorial pedagogy

One element which was repeatedly highlighted by interviewees was the territorial pedagogy which is employed within the UIP. In this section I analyse the role which territory plays within the pedagogical praxis, before presenting a brief discussion of the concept of territory as per the ancestral epistemologies of the UIP. An important aspect to consider for any pedagogical process, but which is particularly relevant in this case, is the question of place: where the pedagogical process occurs, and how that place or places relate to the learning processes which arise. The UIP is an itinerant process: activities are rotated between the different territories of the social movements which are part of the process, and the Nomadesc headquarters in Cali.

¹⁰ A colloquial word which roughly translates as horseplay, includes playful banter and ribbing.

¹¹ Umaña Menodza was assassinated in 1998, and became a martyr for social movements across Colombia.



Photo 6.5: Students of the UIP during a ‘recorrido territorial’ in a peasant community, North of Valle, 2018 Credit: Patrick Kane

The territorial pedagogy - of going to the territories, of walking them, of learning ‘in the field’ and through interaction with the communities and their struggles - was identified as a very important element by the participants in their learning process:

...a part that I liked a lot in the process was interacting with the territory, of walking the territories and learning about them, and learning about and identifying the problems that were faced within the territory, which one as a young person I was unaware of, it was about ‘walking the word’. (youth activist of rural Afro-Colombian community in situation of displacement, graduate of first cohort of UIP, interview, 2018)

The learning for me was about going to Cerro Tijeras or Honduras (indigenous communities) or going to the peasant community in Tulua, being there and seeing it, that is the best learning space there is and that is what the university is all about (Rural Afro-Colombian community leader who was a diploma student in the early years, interview, 2018).

The indigenous, Afro-Colombian and peasant movements which participate in the UIP have unique ways of relating to, organising and conceptualising their territories, meaning that these are spaces in which alternative value systems and modes of social relations flourish. They also have varying levels of political autonomy over their territory meaning that they are living, working examples of alternative models of community life. In line with Nomadesc’s rejection of the separation between thinking and feeling, the

process seeks to harness embodied and experiential knowledge and learning processes which occur through participants travelling to, connecting and interacting with these territories and communities.

Being here in the countryside feels calm even though we know this is a context of violence and tension that the communities have to endure, to come to these so called 'liberated' territories of the social movements always offers a lot of peace and a lot of joy, the exercise of being in community/communal living...it is striking...and it helps understand the spiritual aspects of the struggle...it should be noted that the issue of food is always the most concrete aspect of these territorial struggles. (Activist allied to the UIP process, interview, 2018)

The citation above provides descriptive insight into how the rural territories of socio-territorial movements provide a fertile terrain for embodied, counter-hegemonic learning processes. Although many of the rural, and sometimes urban, territories of the UIP organisations suffer from the presence of armed groups and the violence of the armed conflict, their territories are spaces of life and hope, where people gather to dream into existence a different world and work together to make it a reality (Kane, ethnographic fieldnotes, 2018). For socio-territorial movements, territory and their relationship to it forms part of their identity. Therefore, the process of political socialisation, and the generation of new subjectivities, are highly interwoven with territory in its political, social, cultural and spiritual dimensions. For these movements, territory is a site of political socialisation which generates new encounters and values (Halvorsen et al, 2019:p1457). The territories and organisational processes of the social movements involved in the UIP are spaces in which the value practices and social relations of capitalism do not prevail, and where the counter-hegemonic value systems more accurately identified with non-capitalist values such as solidarity, equality, and reciprocity are sustained. Spaces where people gather to share ideas and strategies in the search for social transformation, where the transformations they want to see through their daily activities are already being created and put into practice in the everyday lives of communities, and where social movements and struggles are formed and reproduced. What I would like to highlight here is how, through the pedagogy of the process, these territories are leveraged in order to facilitate and strengthen the processes of learning, diverse identities, and critical consciousness of the participants. This territorial element of the pedagogy can be understood as an important dimension of the intercultural knowledge dialogue which is facilitated by the pedagogical praxis.

This territorial pedagogy also serves to develop the sense of class consciousness in the participating subjects, who come to identify with the broader social movement. In this way the process makes tangible the sense of a subaltern social movement, made up of movements struggling in different ways and spread across the territories of the region:

I think that [the pedagogical process] contributed to the consolidation of the social movement in the region...as well as the diplomas in the regions - Cali, Buenaventura etc., there were also spaces for reading and analysing the context at a regional level [the Tejiendo Resistencias annual events], that contributed to helping us understand the problems on a regional scale, and it has been a sustainable process because up until today we continue thinking in terms of the southwest region...so in this sense there was an integration in our thinking in terms of the southwest, it is an important contribution which is sustained in the present. (leading activist, Black Communities Process, facilitator and ally throughout history of the pedagogical process, interview, 2018)

The concept of territory within the epistemologies of the UIP

Over recent years, increasing emphasis has been placed within the (Nomadesc) pedagogical praxis on the experiences and knowledge which arise from the rural territories of indigenous, Afro-Colombian and peasant communities. Yet, the pedagogical value of these territories does not arise from the physical attributes of the landscapes and ecosystems in which these movements make and remake their daily lives (spectacular as they may be), but rather from the ways in which these communities conceptualise, relate to and organise their territories, the systems of social relations and values which they have established within them.

One of the most prominent aspects of the indigenous and afro-descendent epistemologies mentioned above is the centrality of the concept of 'territory'. For socio-territorial movements (movements that by definition hold territory - including in the UIP the indigenous, afro-descendent and peasant sectors¹²), territory is both a means and an end: it is part of the movement's *raison d'être*, part of its strategy to achieve its objectives, but also a key element of their identities and worldviews (Halvorsen et al, 2019). Within the conceptual and discursive constructions of the pedagogical process, but also in the pedagogical praxis, the concept of territory (and the struggle for territory) became central to the pedagogical process with the increased participation of peasant, indigenous and Afro-descendent socio-territorial movements. These movements are fighting processes of enclosure within their territories (De Angelis, 2007). So how do the indigenous and afro-descendent movements of the UIP conceptualise and produce their relationship to their territories?

¹² In Colombia, both indigenous and black communities have the right to collective land ownership in their territories. Black communities won this right in the 1991 Constitution after an intense struggle. The right to collective land ownership is a longstanding demand of peasant movements in the country.

For me, territory means everything ...a space that is the territory, not seen as something material that I can sell it and leave it and turn it into an asset, but as a living space, a space for dignified life, let's say that for me that is the territory, Leila Arroyo says that for others the territory is a space of the accumulation of wealth, for us the territory is a life space and not only human life, but of life in the sense of all the beings that there, for me that is the territory, we have risked life itself for our territories, these are where our culture has been reproduced, where we have reproduced life and dignity despite all the systematic and structural violence imparted by the state against us, in spite of the structural racism of the economic, political and legal system, we have lived together as a community, we have made community in our territories. (Rural Afro-Colombian community leader, former student in later phases of diploma, interview, 2018)

The citation above, from a prominent Afro-Colombian leader who was a student in the diploma, provides some foundations of the conception of the territory from the perspective of black communities in Colombia. First, and key for all sectors (and for all socio-territorial movements): the territory is seen as a 'living space', in contrast to the Western capitalist conceptualisation of territory as an economic good and a 'space for the accumulation of wealth'. Second, territory is understood as a space which facilitates communities to live with dignity with the freedom to recreate their culture, despite the systematic violence and exclusion they have faced in society. That is to say: the fact that communities have had their own territories for generations has facilitated the construction of dignity and autonomy, and hence preservation of the culture of black communities. Unlike the capitalist vision, territory for the movements of the UIP is seen as a collective endeavour, both in terms of the organisation of community life and in terms of ownership.

For the following interviewee, there was a sense that the territory also represents a link with the past and the future of Afro-descendent communities:

[Territory] means the history of what slavery meant for our ancestors and I say it means history because I am clear that the territory where we live was not a gift to our people, they didn't bring black people from Africa to give them the land where we now live as a black community, but they had to work the slave plantations and work in the mines, and they had to struggle very hard to acquire those lands. But it also means in terms of the future, my ancestors thought of me and our community, so I can't just think about myself- I have to think about the renaciente in the next generations and [protecting territory] for my children, my grandchildren. There is a river where I would go to fish with my grandparents as a child, my grandad would catch a sack of fish and share it with the community, our principle of solidarity between peoples is also for future generations because I want my grandchildren also to be able to go to the river ... (Rural Afro-Colombian community leader, former student in later phases of diploma, interview, 2018).

The citation above is key because it places the concept of the territory (and the defence thereof) as a central objective of the struggle of the Afro-Colombian people, and also as an achievement of the struggle which has taken place since the time of slavery. According to the interviewee, this historical struggle of their ancestors bestows a collective responsibility upon today's black communities to care for and defend their territory; this responsibility also derives from the responsibility to protect and preserve the heritage which the territory represents for future generations. But in addition to heritage, territory for black communities can be understood as having an element of reparation for historical injustices:

territory is patrimony, but it also is a kind of reparation for the enslavement and all of the suffering of our people...so if we they end up losing the territories that we have, it is as if history will end take revenge on us once more, our communities have already historically been victims (historic leader PCN-BN at regional and national level, historical ally of Nomadesc and pedagogical process, interview, 2018)

In the citation above, today's processes of accumulation by dispossession, and the struggle of the black communities in defence of the territory, is put into the perspective of the enormous historical injustices committed against their ancestors. The sense of ownership of the territory is increased precisely because of the historical debts that the Colombian state has with the Afro-Colombian population, and the current dispossession/enclosure processes demonstrate, in the eyes of the communities, the continuity of the historical *modus operandi* of the Colombian political and economic elites. The quotation also demonstrates how territory must be understood not only as an objective of the struggle but also as the patrimony/legacy of previous struggles of ancestors throughout the centuries.

Within the Nasa indigenous thought, the concept of territory is central to their spiritual beliefs, in which nature is understood as a revered, sentient being which nourishes life but at the same time must also be looked after and cherished. In this conception, humans cohabit within their territory with all other forms of life, as just another element of nature:

Mother Nature is wise, she is a living being, she knows how to cleanse and renew herself, she is a great bosom for the living beings which inhabit the earth. The Earth does not belong to us: we belong to the earth, we are part of it, that is why we bury the umbilical cord when a baby is born, to recognise that we all come from the Earth and there we will return and that is why we must take care of it, we must defend it, we must love it, it is the territory which feeds us, gives us life, gives us a roof. Without a body we cannot live, nor without territory. That is why we mustn't contaminate it, destroy it, or appropriate it - we cannot own something that is sacred, we are insignificant alongside the Earth, that is why we do not share the Western conception of private property: for us it belongs to nobody, and we must all take care of it, that is our collective responsibility. Within our thinking we do not understand the need to accumulate - why

accumulate? Because we don't live with what is necessary to live well and be in harmony with nature, be happy and grateful to be able to feed ourselves, to have a roof, to have clothes, what we need but without having to accumulate and destroy ... (Indigenous activist and university academic, facilitator in UIP, interview, 2018).

The territory is conceived as a mother, a provider of life that is synonymous with life itself and which facilitates the possibility of a dignified existence. For indigenous and Afro-descendant communities, the struggle to defend territory is an existential struggle which warrants the sacrifice of one's own life if necessary. The citation above also makes clear what is at stake in the struggle for the definition of the territory, since the capitalist notion of 'development' stands in stark contrast to the conception of harmony and balance in terms of this conception of territory and the relationship which humans should have with it. Again, the capitalist notions of private property and accumulation of wealth are questioned.

In both of the conceptions discussed, there is a strong sense in which territory is closely linked to alternative political processes of grassroots construction, rooted in autonomous, organic forms of organising which have developed in isolation from state institutions and with limited penetration by the value system and logic of capitalist modernity.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has presented a discussion of the epistemological inner workings of the pedagogical process, which is based upon the philosophical and methodological principle of intercultural knowledge dialogue. I have provided a deep insight into the learning and knowledge processes which demonstrate a genuinely organic, counter-hegemonic, intrinsically decolonial praxis which has evolved over time as a result of its sensitivity to the cultures, struggles and histories of the participating movements. This praxis is based on notions of epistemological justice, and brings together diverse subaltern subjects of struggle with their different epistemologies, knowledges and lineages of struggle which have been historically subjugated, together with so-called expert or professional knowledge, collapsing the knowledge hierarchies which continue to operate within capitalist societies.

Through the intercultural knowledge dialogue, the cultural and political diversity of the social movements is converted into a pedagogical resource rather than ignored or subsumed. The chapter has shown that such a dialogue, when created between subjects of struggle, generates valuable counter-hegemonic learning and semiotic processes. The dynamic conceptual and discursive constructions produced as a result of this decolonial knowledge dialogue between subjects of struggle emerge from and are geared

towards the struggles of the movements. Their embeddedness within struggle makes them particularly salient and valuable for the participating subjects.

Our discussion provided a window into the way that the emotional dimension of knowledge is harnessed within the pedagogical process in order to empower participants and create connections at an emotional level between participants and each other's struggles. Participants reported how the interaction of such diverse subject's struggle generated a strong sense of hope, which can be understood as the aggregation of the hope which underpins the existence of each of the individual struggles. This emotional dimension, and Nomadesc's praxis of hope, as vital as they are intangible, and are important for understanding the ways in which radical pedagogical praxis can increase the sustainability/durability of social struggles in repressive contexts by maintaining or increasing the motivation of activists to carry on in the face of adversity.

Nomadesc's pedagogical praxis demonstrates the potential of an intercultural social movement praxis which engages with emotion, identity, culture and difference, whilst retaining a broader class-based structural analysis and politics.

SECTION THREE

Chapter 7: Conclusion

In this thesis, I have attempted to understand the role which a radical intercultural pedagogical initiative plays in the struggles of social movements to construct and defend alternative modes of being and organising in the repressive context of southwest Colombia. Drawing upon the systematisation of experiences methodology, I have engaged in an in-depth analysis of the learning and knowledge production processes which are generated through Nomadesc's pedagogical praxis. My research questions were concerned with the 'how', the 'what', and the 'so what' of these learning and knowledge production processes: that is, I sought to understand the nature and content of these processes, and to explore the effects which they have upon the social movements and their struggles in the region.

I hope with this thesis to have made a small contribution to the sociology of the Epistemologies of the South, and to have responded to Boaventura de Sousa Santos' assertion that:

alternatives of knowledge and of action must be searched for, either where they have been most obviously suppressed or have survived in marginalised/discredited form.
(Santos, 1999:p38)

The Epistemologies of the South framework underlies my methodological design, which sought throughout to foreground the thought, histories, strategies and concepts of those at the forefront of subaltern struggles in the Global South. In line with this approach, the three preceding chapters have sought to 'listen to the South' and address the research questions by drawing out themes which were deemed important by the participants themselves – the protagonists of the process under examination. I have sought as far as possible to draw out the emergent themes whilst minimising the engagement of external theoretical framings in order to answer the research questions. Of course, this is not to deny my own subjectivity within the research process or my position within the social world: ultimately it is impossible for the social scientist to claim objectivity in a research process or to somehow stand outside of the social reality which is being observed. Whilst I sought as much as possible to be led by and to foreground the thought of the participants in the research process and evidence them in the writing process, ultimately this must pass through the substantial filter of my own interpretations (which were subsequently checked with participants as far as possible).

I have sought to follow Santos' call for the social scientist to act as a translator in order to contribute towards a decolonised theory of translation, which truly engages with the Epistemologies of the South, thus reversing colonial epistemological trends within Western academia (Santos, 2006, 2012, 2012a). Santos brings an axiological dimension to my theoretical framework, whereby research becomes a question of emancipation and solidarity, rather than simply the production of knowledge for the (Western) academy, and hence creating the basis for a decolonial epistemological framework rooted in principles of epistemological pluralism, dialogue and reciprocity. It also brings into focus the inextricable relationship between knowledge and power, both in the functioning of the dominant epistemological frameworks of modernity and its subjugation and rendering invisible alternative epistemologies; but also in the way that peoples and movements can build counter-power through intercultural collaboration and alternative knowledge production.

In this concluding chapter, I begin by summarising the principal findings which emerge from my thesis and which may be of interest to both critical academics and activists. I then go on to use this discussion to relate some of my findings to relevant theoretical debates within the critical literature on social movements and emancipatory struggle. This process of bringing the thinking and experience-based theory of the pedagogical process into dialogue with broader theoretical debates is in line with Burawoy's extended case method, in which a vital step is generating dialogue between pre-existing theories and real-lived experience (Burawoy, 2009). Finally, the chapter makes some concluding comments and suggestions for further research.

7.1 Summary of principal findings

The analysis presented in this thesis has demonstrated that as an emancipatory initiative which emerged from and is embedded within the social movement struggles of southwest Colombia, the Nomadesc pedagogical process is itself a continuous learning process. Throughout its two decades of existence the process has been shaped by a dialectic of learning which exists between the pedagogical initiative and the struggles of the social movements involved. This dialectic, and its embeddedness within social struggles, allows for a dynamic, horizontal process of collective knowledge construction, as well as the constant renewal and rapid adaptation of the process in order to respond to the ever-changing conjunctures and the requirements of the region's social struggles.

Central to understanding the learning processes associated with the pedagogical process is the way that it creates an intercultural knowledge dialogue between diverse subjects of struggle. Within this

intercultural knowledge dialogue, the diversity of the movements is conceived as a container of emancipatory potential. This diversity can be understood as the multiple dimensions of the participants' humanness: including their collective and individual identities, languages, emotions, struggles, experiences and histories. Within this praxis, culture is understood as a dimension in which resistance is reproduced.

The pedagogical process can be understood as a patchwork quilt of epistemologies, which interact and are interwoven to form part of a broader whole, and through their interaction generate new counter-hegemonic semiotic and non-semiotic processes. This dialogical interaction serves not only to deepen the critical consciousness of participants, but also to facilitate the collective construction of new meanings.

This does not mean that participants replicate the thinking or values of the other movement and begin to think in the same way, but rather that all knowledge and ways of thinking are valued, celebrated, and seen as important elements, and alongside other cultures and knowledges, they feed into the semiotic processes which occur for the collective construction and circulation of counter-hegemonic knowledge for the strengthening of social struggles. Within this cross-pollination of ideas and culture, the epistemologies and struggles of socio-territorial movements have been influential for other movements whose struggles may not be directly related to the defence of territory, but which nevertheless have been influenced, inspired and affected by this interaction.

The UIP is an intrinsically decolonial process in its epistemological approach, in the way that it brings together diverse epistemologies which have been historically subjugated (as well as so-called expert or professional knowledge) in an intercultural, non-hierarchical knowledge dialogue, thus collapsing the knowledge hierarchies which continue to operate within capitalist modernity. The pedagogical process creates a deeply prefigurative learning space characterised by alternative (non-capitalist) values and social relations, yet at the same time focussed upon urgent, immediate tasks of confronting the violent and powerful structures responsible for oppression in southwest Colombia.

The intercultural encounter which takes place within the pedagogical process generates learning processes relating to identity which occur on two levels. On one level, the encounter serves to reinforce the diverse collective identities of the different subjects. The pedagogical praxis understands the movements and their knowledges, cultures and histories as holding emancipatory potential, but recognises that it must begin with repairing, recovering, strengthening and valuing that which has been

so violently subjugated for centuries. These collective identities are recognised as dynamic processes which are themselves constantly being produced, reproduced and altered. This is why a key element of the pedagogical process is the aim that participants recognise the value of the collective identities that they carry, and of the history of struggle and sacrifice that is part of each of those identities.

On the second level, the pedagogical praxis serves to generate a sense of collective subaltern identity and belonging which does not collapse or subsume other identities. Through the interaction with other subjects in struggle, participants described a learning process which is facilitated through the recognition of the interconnectedness of struggles and the identification of common oppressors. This process generated in them a feeling of belonging to a social movement which extended beyond their own movement or territory to the regional and national level, and was made up of very diverse peoples and organisations with very different stories. This can be understood as the generation of a sense of intercultural, territorial subaltern identity. These two levels of identity-related learning processes are mutually reinforcing, as opposed to the historical tendency for social movement organising processes to counterpose and ultimately subsume collective (cultural) identities under a broader, overriding (political) identity – such as class.

The concrete, localised experiences of injustice and violence of the communities and social movements involved in the pedagogical process provide them with an embodied understanding of the violent *modus operandi* of the capitalist system in southwest Colombia. The intercultural encounter provides an opportunity for activists to collectively reflect upon each other's experiences, struggles and praxis. The process draws upon the experiences of the diverse participants in order to illustrate their interconnection and systemic nature. By reflecting upon and engaging with their own and each other's experiences, participants learn about the macro-economic processes and concepts which shape the violence that affects the participants' territories.

Along with the emphasis on the interaction between diverse actors in resistance, the process also employs a territorial-experiential pedagogical approach. This is based on the learning potential of participants travelling to the different territories of social movements to learn directly about their struggles, interweaving, building and multiplying knowledge among different territories of social movements. Participants particularly valued the varied incidental and embodied learning processes which arise from collectively travelling to social movement territories. Through linking up these different territories of struggle, Nomadesc creates *geographies of counter-hegemonic knowledge* which facilitate the circulation

of knowledge, tools and information which increase the capacity of social movements to defend human rights, resist displacement, consolidate their organising and build solidarity with other movements.

The intellectual, discursive and conceptual production of the pedagogical process is dynamic and is driven by the learning dialectic between the pedagogical process and the struggles of the social movements of the southwest region of Colombia. Nomadesc's pedagogical approach seeks to harness the rich learning and knowledge production processes which occur during peaks in social movement mobilisation, such that these nourish the learning of participants within the pedagogical process, and hence serve to strengthen the social movements which they represent, in what can be understood as a kind of cross-pollinating learning process. At the same time, participants emphasised the value of the practical tools and knowledge which they gained and which were directly useful in their social movement praxis, for example in relation to the defence of human rights or community-level participatory action research.

Social movements (and their pedagogical processes) do not emerge from a political and ideological vacuum. Nomadesc, and the pedagogical process, is shaped by ideological and political lineages and struggles of Colombia's social movements. Nomadesc emerged from a particular political lineage within Colombian social movements, and hence the pedagogical process since its inception has been heavily influenced by the praxis-oriented ideological framework of social humanism. Social humanism emerged in Colombia from the ideas of revolutionary scholars, and posits a radical humanist praxis (with a strong emphasis on the agency and knowledge-bearing character of communities), influenced by liberation theology, and based on a non-deterministic historical materialist class analysis, grounded in Latin American ideas, histories and experiences. This includes an expansive conception of human rights which takes as a reference point the Algiers Declaration of the Rights of Peoples. It also means a radical praxis of the defence of human rights which is closely linked to struggles for social justice; is receptive to and embedded in the reality of peoples and communities, with their knowledges in all of its dimensions - including their cultures, stories, emotions and experiences; and which seeks to empower the social subjects with whom it works.

Whilst impacts are qualitative and often intangible, through a case study of the PCN-BN in Buenaventura I was able to demonstrate how participation in the pedagogical process had a large impact upon one of the Southwest's most prominent social movements. My discussion of the case study data revealed the existence of *ripple learning effects* which can be traced along temporal and spatial dimensions, as knowledge and learning processes cascaded through time and across the territories of the participating

organisations of the UIP. I was able to trace the ripple learning effects generated by the participation of PCN-BN activists in the pedagogical process, impacting at the collective level the political consciousness and as a result transforming aspects of the movement's praxis. This in turn impacted the praxis of the PCN-BN's sister organisations, and ultimately contributed to one of Latin America's most momentous social struggles of the 21st century.

7.2 Linking my findings to broader theoretical debates on social movement learning and praxis

Having provided a brief overview of the central research findings, the following discussion now draws out elements of my research in order to link them to relevant theoretical debates around social movement learning, knowledge production and praxis. This will provide an insight into the contribution which my research can make to such debates, as well as locating my own findings within these explanatory frameworks and hence allowing readers to gain a deeper insight into the findings, and the logic of the pedagogical strategy.

Locating the ontological logic of an intercultural strategy

Massimo De Angelis' work provides a framework which can help to frame the ontology of Nomadesc's pedagogical strategy. At the same time, my research provides a concrete example of a social movement initiative which seeks to address what De Angelis identifies as the central challenge of our time: the question of how social movements can articulate their struggles in order to generate and sustain new value practices (De Angelis, 2007). As set out in chapter 3, De Angelis understands the ongoing social conflict between capital and the subaltern classes as a continuous dialectic that manifests as value struggles, and which he articulates in the following way:

either capital makes the world through commodification and enclosures, or it is the rest of us - whoever is that 'us' - that makes the world through counter-enclosures and commons (De Angelis, 2007:p134)

Enclosures are the 'generative mechanism' by which capital seeks to convert all value practices to its own profit-making logic by creating and expanding markets, and forcing people into markets through *disciplinary integration* processes (ibid). Applying De Angelis' framework to Nomadesc and the Colombian context, we can understand the diverse struggles of the social movements which Nomadesc works with as struggles to create, defend and expand the commons against varying forms of enclosure: whether against the privatisation of public services; struggles against industrial resource extraction in community

territories; struggles for the expansion of indigenous reserves, struggles against eviction of urban communities to make way for corporate development, etc. As has been set out amply elsewhere in this thesis, the hegemonic forces of capital in Colombia have throughout the country's modern history routinely employed violence in their constant struggles with subaltern social movements to enclose and commodify the commons.

Crucially, De Angelis' ontological paradigm posits that capitalism doesn't encompass the entire system of values and relationships of human society: there are always spheres of social relations and values which fall outside the logic of capital – which De Angelis terms the 'outside' of capitalism (2007:p34). As set out in chapter 3, this 'outside' very often does not exist as a distinct realm, but rather exists in a relationship of dialectical co-existence. Struggles to create, expand and defend commons against enclosure are sites of production and reproduction of non-capitalist values – a '*contingent and contextual*' outside which '*emerges from concrete struggles*' (ibid).

Orlando Fals Borda argued that historically the unforgiving geography of Colombia, and the resistance of the peoples since the invasion of the European conquerors in 1492, have placed limits upon the expansion of capitalism and its value system. Hence, he states that Colombia is a country in which there exist peoples, cultures, and territories where the logic of capitalist modernity has not been able to penetrate substantially, and where social relations prevail which could be categorised as non-capitalist (Fals Borda, 2008;p55). He argues that it is the values of the 'base' groups in Colombia - the indigenous, Afro-Colombian and peasant peoples – which preserve a '*pre-capitalist value structure*': these cultures are characterised by values such as '*solidarity, dignity, freedom, and autonomy*' (ibid: p23). When we additionally consider the country's vibrant and diverse urban and rural social struggles, it is clear that within De Angelis' ontological framing, Colombia is a country with a significant 'outside' of capitalism.

Applying De Angelis' conceptualisation, the diverse struggles, territories and cultures of the social movements which converge within the UIP can be understood as individual elements of Colombia's 'outside' of capitalism. That is not to say that these are spaces entirely devoid of capitalist logic or capitalist social relations. Rather, I argue that we can consider the territories and organisational processes of the social movements involved in the UIP as sites in which the social relations and practices of value of capital do not prevail, and where the seeds of counter-hegemonic alternatives are cultivated.

As I argued in chapter 6, the rural territories of socio-territorial movements, with their varying levels of economic and political autonomy, in particular provide a fertile terrain for embodied, counter-hegemonic learning processes: spaces of life and hope, where people gather to dream a different world and collaborate to plan how to make it a reality (Kane, ethnographic fieldnotes, 2018). These spaces are the physical manifestation of the great 'outside' that De Angelis speaks of. That is to say, they are physical spaces where the dominant social relations are not those of the capitalist value system, more accurately identified with non-capitalist values such as solidarity, equality, and reciprocity. Spaces in which people gather to share ideas and strategies in the search for social transformation, where the transformations they want to see through their daily activities are already being created and put into practice, and where social movements and struggles are formed and reproduced. Yet this thesis has demonstrated that these manifestations of Colombia's outside are not what Dinerstein (2014) would term 'self-contained utopias', but rather this is an outside which is created and recreated in the midst of the most complex and trying of circumstances. These circumstances are Colombia's value struggles in which the country's economic and political elites' violently attempts to create and expand markets, opening territories and social relations up to commodification and exploitation, and in the process dismantle these alternative modes and configurations.

De Angelis argues that the central challenge for social movements interested in social transformation involving the end of capitalism – is the question of how to articulate their '*diverse and interconnected*' struggles around new value practices, so that '*new common meanings arise*', in order to extend and consolidate that exterior. For him, the key question for those who want to see a change in the dominant value system is '*how do we (re)produce, sustain and extend an outside of capital's value practices?*' (Ibid:p239).

I argue that Nomadesc's pedagogical praxis is one example of the answers which social movements in the Global South are providing to the De Angelis' question. It can be understood as a strategy that seeks to connect different elements of the great 'outside', employing its territorial pedagogy in order to connect and articulate diverse collective subjects of struggle across political, cultural and geographical boundaries. These connections/interactions facilitate cross-fertilisation of knowledge, tools and ideas between movements and territories, and generate processes of counter-hegemonic learning, knowledge production and political socialisation.

In this way Nomadesc's pedagogical process operates to produce, sustain and extend an outside to capital's value practices on two levels: on the one hand by generating learning processes which strengthen the participating social movements in their respective struggles, and on the other hand through the generation of counter-hegemonic knowledge production and semiotic processes. These knowledges and meaning production processes can themselves be understood as the production of a new commons: of knowledge, meanings, concepts and connections which emerge from the intercultural knowledge dialogue between social movements. Nomadesc's experience demonstrates the role which that radical intercultural or cross-sectoral pedagogy can play in articulating diverse struggles, linking up different territories and bringing together diverse subjects of struggle on the basis of a collective learning process.

The 'outside' to which De Angelis refers is, of course, a metaphor for all non-capitalist social relations and value practices. Whilst, as with any abstract theory, this metaphor simplifies reality for the sake of analysis, it is important to avoid falling into romanticism over the cultures and territories of the outside, or to be tempted to see totalities in terms of value systems where there are none. Just as De Angelis argues that capitalism is not a system that encompasses everything, neither could it be said that in these processes and spaces where non-capitalist values prevail, values and social relations are entirely free from capitalist logic or power dynamics. The existence of the dialectic of value struggles is a demonstration of this co-existence of the capitalist and non-capitalist logic within communities and social movements. Yet, it is no coincidence that Colombia's most celebrated examples of this outside are the territories of rural socio-territorial movements which have managed to retain some level of economic and political autonomy and hence avoid being drawn into capitalist relations of production. These are the territories which Nomadesc seeks to harness within its pedagogical praxis: the elements of the Colombian outside of capitalism which Nomadesc links through its pedagogical praxis.

Canadian sociologist Alan Sears posits that any counter-hegemonic process needs to rely upon an 'infrastructure of dissent':

through which people develop the collective capacities for memory, analysis, vision and solidarity required to sustain ongoing currents of resistance. (Sears, 2014:p2)

Such an infrastructure includes physical spaces, cultural and educational events where people from different organisations and movements can meet, interact, share ideas and intertwine their struggles. Sears claims that neoliberal processes on multiple levels have served to erode infrastructures of dissent (ibid). This is especially the case in the West, yet is a process which is nonetheless noticeable in Colombia

following decades of neoliberal policies. Sears' notion of infrastructure of dissent is useful to understand the contribution which Nomadesc makes to social struggles in the southwest Colombia: Nomadesc's pedagogical process, along with its broader work, provides a valuable (increasingly rare) element of a broad-ranging modern-day intercultural infrastructure of dissent, increasing the counter-power of social movements by facilitating the interaction of diverse subjects of struggle. The Nomadesc HQ is a physical space that is placed at the disposition of social struggles in the region, a nodal point where the linking of different territories of the organisations participating in the pedagogical process occurs. The pedagogical process can be understood in the same way, fulfilling a function of providing a meeting space for the different organisational processes of the different territories that are part of the 'outside' of the social movements of the southwestern region. In this sense, the UIP can itself be considered an intercultural commons which provides a physical and epistemological instance of infrastructure of dissent that facilitates the construction of counter-power by subaltern social movements in southwest Colombia.

Intercultural knowledge dialogue as an ecology of knowledge

My analysis has demonstrated the role which the intercultural knowledge dialogue between subjects of struggle can play as a generator and driver of counter-hegemonic learning and knowledge production. At a time when the word 'interculturality' is 'in fashion' (Walsh, 2017:p2), Nomadesc's represents a rare example of a concrete subaltern praxis which is embedded within struggle, generating intercultural dialogue and relationality as a means of strengthening existing struggles, developing subjectivities, and generating a fabric of struggle. The learning processes which are generated pertain to different dimensions of knowledge and learning. Besides the acquisition of practical knowledge and skills which can benefit the organising praxis of participants, this thesis has identified learning processes related to identity and emotions, as well as counter—hegemonic semiotic processes. Nomadesc's pedagogical praxis is hence a working example of what Boaventura de Sousa Santos would term an 'ecology of knowledges' (Santos, 2007). My research confirms the rich potential of intercultural interaction and 'translation' between subjects which have been historically excluded and oppressed and whose struggles and cultures contain 'other' knowledges which through their interaction can generate processes of grassroots counter-hegemonic theory building. This is what Santos would refer to as a 'post-modern' critical theory-building process, in the sense that it overcomes the homogenising tendency of capitalist modernity's epistemological drive to seek a universally applicable general theory, and instead advocates for the development of a theory of translation (Santos, 1999). I argue that through generating this intercultural knowledge dialogue between diverse subjects of struggle, Nomadesc's pedagogical praxis facilitates the

construction of just such a theory of translation. Rather than an academic pursuit, this counter-hegemonic subaltern theory-making process is a form of building collective power, which demonstrates how diversity can be harnessed in radical pedagogical processes which seek to build unity between social movements.

The Argentinian decolonial feminist Catherine Walsh's has argued that:

interculturality and decoloniality from below go hand in hand...interculturality which is thought and acted upon 'from below' has always had a transformative intentionality. This intentionality is directed towards, on the one hand, the affirmation of ourselves- of what has been oppressed and denied...and on the other hand, it is directed towards the 'inter-relation' which is only really possible when the colonial difference is overcome. (Walsh, 2017: p3)

Walsh is correct to identify the link between interculturality and decoloniality, and the above statement would appear to support my characterisation of Nomadesc's intercultural praxis as a genuinely decolonial, dialogical pedagogical process. Further, the use of pedagogy to foment this intercultural relationality is key for the generation of solidarity between the participating movements. As Bhandar and Ziadah remind us, *'there is nothing spontaneous about solidarity; it is historically rooted and comes about through consistent dialogue, learning/unlearning, and joint struggle.'* (2020: p25).

As mentioned above, the pedagogical process since its inception has been heavily influenced by the Colombian praxis-oriented ideological framework of social humanism. A framework for social action which has found its definition as much in the praxis and organising of Colombian social movements as it has in academic pages, social humanism is an ideology which is endogenous to the Colombian context, and little known in the West. In line with the Epistemologies of the South framework of this research, this thesis has engaged with social humanism in order to understand and act as a translator for the ideational and ideological lineages which have shaped Nomadesc's praxis. My analysis has demonstrated that social humanism's conception of the transformational capacity contained within diverse subaltern knowledges and cultures, its receptivity to subjective dimensions of the human experience, and its dialogical methodology helped to facilitate a paradigm shift within the Nomadesc pedagogical process as the praxis came to embrace the culture, knowledge and organisational forms of rural indigenous, black and peasant movements. Social humanism's centring of the human subject, which is at the same time understood as a *collective being*, provided the ideal basis for an activist praxis which could open itself up to the epistemologies and cultures of the social movements involved.

The paradigm shift which occurred with the increased participation of black and indigenous social movements demonstrates what can be understood as a decolonising, pluralist ideological weaving process. Through this process, the praxis of intercultural knowledge dialogue is able to draw upon the multiple epistemological and ideological frameworks which converge within the pedagogical process. In this age of crisis, in which there is an increasing recognition of the need for the renewal of emancipatory frameworks for action, social humanism provides a framework which emphasises the capacity of human subjects acting upon reality in order to transform it and brings the human subject into the focus of analysis as a knowledge-bearing, sentient, culturally and epistemologically diverse collective being. It does so whilst retaining a class-based structural analysis of the functioning of Colombian society within a broader imperialist system dominated by the US. In this sense, it is able to avoid the structure-agency binary which has proved so problematic within revolutionary ideological-theoretical debates, as well as the ideological dogmatism which has characterised orthodox Marxist thinking due to its roots in capitalist modernity's epistemological drive for an overarching universal theory. In line with influential currents of critical thinking within Latin America such as those Zapatistas, as well as the Open Marxist tendency associated with thinkers such as John Holloway, proponents of social humanism do not put forward a ready-made ideological solution, but rather argue that the solution must be worked out and developed by those at the forefront of struggles through their own processes of organising, and based on their own knowledge (Holloway, 2005; 2016). Hence, social humanism provides an ideological foundation for Nomadesc's pedagogical praxis which allows it to be culturally sensitive, dynamic, open-ended and pluralist, and at the same time embedded within a strong anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist class politics. As with any genuine critical pedagogy, it is also a two-way process: Nomadesc and its popular educators are also transforming themselves, and their thinking, as the process has evolved.

As I have shown, the question of identity is central to a genuine intercultural praxis from below. Latin American scholars have warned of the dangers of fetishisation and essentialisation of identity in decolonial theory and praxis (Cusucanqui, 2018 & 2012; Escobar, 2007). Too often, discussions of indigenous, peasant, or Afro-descendent identity tend towards superficial representations which freeze such identities in time and place, and which *'postulate a foundational alterity and a transcendental subject that would constitute a radical alternative to an equally homogenised modern/European/North American Other'* Escobar, 2007: p200). Hence Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui argues, *'we have become artifices of our own colonisation. Unconsciously we have contributed to*

the prevailing fetishes and ornamental elements of the identification with the indigenous world' (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2018: p98).

I have shown in this thesis that Nomadesc's is a decolonial intercultural social movement praxis which seeks to harness identity and difference as a source of strength and pedagogical resource. Within this pedagogical praxis, the different identities which converge within the initiative are regularly discussed, highlighted and reaffirmed. I argue that Nomadesc in its work seeks to tread the thin line between emphasising and politicising identity and difference, and falling into reification or essentialisation of identity. My thesis demonstrates the complexity of this task for any such praxis, and the importance of a dynamic conceptualisation of identity. Rivera Cusicanqui proposes that we *'think of identity not as closed off on a map, but rather as a weave/fabric of exchanges, which is also a feminine fabric and a process of becoming'* (2018:p126). Such a dynamic notion must not deny the importance and value of indigenous or Afro-descendent identity and culture, but it must at the same time recognise that these identities are in constant motion just like any other, and are shaped through human interaction. For Escobar,

To acknowledge the partial, historical, and heterogeneous character of all identities is to begin to correct this flaw [of essentialising, homogenising and freezing identities], and to begin the journey towards views of identity that emerge from an episteme posilustrada, or post-Enlightenment episteme. (2007: p200)

A praxis which engages with the cultural and emotional dimensions of knowledge

Nomadesc's pedagogical praxis is based on a relational, multi-dimensional conceptualisation of the human subject as a *sentipensante* subject of knowledge and emotion. In order to create a genuine intercultural dialogue, emancipatory pedagogical praxis must engage with the cultural and emotional 'subjective' dimensions of human knowledge which have historically tended to be undervalued by Marxist theorists and revolutionary initiatives. Whether explicitly or implicitly, these dimensions are as fundamental to any emancipatory struggle as they are to human existence itself. Nomadesc's experience demonstrates that these subjective realms can be harnessed within radical pedagogical praxis in order to generate counter-hegemonic learning processes within the realm of human emotion and feeling.

Scholar revolutionaries such as Antonio Gramsci and Amilcar Cabral identified the importance of the ideational realm to the struggle for social transformation, recognising that culture and ideas

produce real, material impacts upon societal (economic) structures and hence help shape history (Cabral, 1979; Gramsci, 2000). Gramsci's work has been highly influential within the literature on social movement learning, particularly his conceptualisation of the way in which ruling classes establish consent to their rule through constructing hegemony, which can be understood as a pedagogical process which occurs in the cultural-ideational realm and through which the subaltern classes adopt the ideas of the ruling classes as their own (Gramsci, 2000). Yet hegemony must always be fragmented, because the cultural-ideational realm contains other knowledges and value practices - those of the subaltern classes. Gramsci conceptualised the knowledge of the subaltern classes as 'folklore' which he understood as being made up of fragments of all of the previous ways of understanding the world, and containing elements of 'good sense', along with superstition, religious beliefs, cultural practices etc (ibid: p362). Whilst recognising the importance of the cultural realm, for writers like Gramsci and Cabral, the cultures of the subaltern classes were something which must be improved or even eventually replaced by a (homogenous or undifferentiated) revolutionary culture. Whilst both were highly original Marxist theorists, they remained within the epistemological framework of modernity which prevented them from recognising the subaltern as a diverse, knowledge-bearing subject, or from a genuine theoretical appreciation of the value of knowledge contained within subaltern culture and produced within social struggles. The logic of Nomadesc's pedagogical praxis stands in stark contrast: rather than something which must be replaced, the various subaltern cultures which converge within the process are understood as having survived colonisation, slavery, state terrorism and paramilitarism: and hence as containers of resistance and counter-hegemonic memory and knowledge. Rather than seek to create a homogenous entity, Nomadesc's praxis seeks to weave together these fragments of resistance to create an intercultural patchwork quilt of learning and knowledge production which draws upon the multiple dimensions of the knowledges of the participating movements - and which recognises that this process inevitably includes an emotional and cultural dimension. Nomadesc's approach is hence a vindication of more recent strands both within Marxism and beyond which valorise the subjective dimensions of knowledge to struggles for social change, and demonstrates the important role which a radical pedagogy attuned to these dimensions can play in broader struggles for social transformation.

Important work has emerged from Latin America which has theorised the cultural and emotional dimensions of knowledge in relation to social movements and struggles against epistemological

domination (Escobar, 2007; Motta, 2014; Rivera Cusicanqui, 2012&2018; Leyva Solano y Icaza, 2019). This work has sought to highlight the ways in which '*emotional, embodied, oral, popular and spiritual knowledges are delegitimised, invisibilised and denied Other ways of relating to the earth, each other, the cosmos and ourselves are annihilated*' (Motta, 2014:p4).

One aspect which emerges from this thesis are the deep learning processes which are generated through the lived experience of alternative ontologies of indigenous, Afro-Colombian and peasant communities in their autonomous ways of living and relating within their territories. Such learning processes undoubtedly cannot be understood without reference to the embodied, emotional and cultural dimensions of learning. Indigenous scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's has described these ontologies as encompassing an alternative notion of grounded freedom:

a sort of relational or grounded freedom, meaning that it takes place in the context of a complex relationality with all of the other beings, communities and nations with whom we share time and space – one that is designed to propel life. It's a freedom to individually and collectively determine the world in which we live. I've learned about this sort of freedom on the land and by practicing it... the children were running around playing, laughing, interacting with each other and the rest of the group in the context of sharing, kindness, gentleness and care. Procedurally, the group was making decisions using consensus and care, fully aware that not everyone feels comfortable on the land and outside of their home environments. To me, this is a glimpse of grounded freedom...A sort of freedom that is an individual and collective practice, designed to promote the well-being and self-determination of both the individual and the communal as interlocking projects. It does not therefore mean one can do whatever they want without hindrance, because causing harm to oneself or to other living beings is not ethically (Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, 2021: p141)

Betasamosake has described such a freedom as incorporating 'whole body intelligence'; 'emotional intelligence'; and 'land-based associative forms of knowledge'. This conceptualisation chimes with the way that participants in Nomadesc's pedagogical process described the learning processes which were generated by the trips to social movement territories as part of the 'recorridos territorials'. Hence, Nomadesc's pedagogical praxis opens up and engages with the emotional and cultural dimensions of knowledge and of the diverse human subject herself. In a postcolonial context such as that of Colombia, with ongoing structural racism, marginalisation and high levels of ongoing political violence and repression on the basis of racial, cultural and political identity, this multi-dimensional view of the subject is essential for any process which seeks to build unity across diverse social movements and struggles.

Praxis of collective historical memory as an ecology of alternative histories

My research into Nomadesc's pedagogical process can contribute to academic debates which seek to understand the role of collective historical memory for social movements and the ways in which they can harness the past within their praxis of the present in order to strengthen their current struggles. A range of literature exists, across multiple disciplines, on the role of collective historical memory within social movements (Eyerman, 2015; Kubal and Becerra, 2014; Doerr, 2014; Zamponi, 2013; Bhandar and Ziadah, 2020; Choudry and Valley eds, 2017, Rivera Cusicanqui, 2018). Within struggles against hegemonic power configurations, collective memory can be understood as a terrain of struggle, which can be harnessed either as a tool for repression and domination (through the production of dominant narratives and the erasure of alternatives); or indeed as a tool for liberation. The politics and logic of coloniality justify the ongoing 'colonisation of memory' (Lugones (2010, p. 745).

Within the social movement learning and radical pedagogy literature, surprisingly little scholarship has engaged with the role of collective historical memory within social movements. A rare contribution to this theme is Choudry and Vally's edited compilation of essays, which provides important insights and recognises the centrality of alternative movement histories to the sustenance of struggles for social change and the various ways in which these histories can assist activists in their organising praxis (Choudry and Vally eds, 2017). For Choudry and Vally, a key question to ask in order to understand social movement learning and knowledge production processes is '*how have people attempted to make history of their struggle part of the struggle itself?*' (ibid:p4). Yet, important as Vally and Choudry's contribution to discussions around social movement learning and knowledge processes and collective historical memory is, they rely upon a fairly narrow understanding of what constitutes collective memory within social struggles, and hence do not fully appreciate the role which it can play within social movement praxis. Bhandar and Ziadah outline an expanded understanding of collective memory, and the role which collective memory can play within social movement praxis:

We want to emphasise that our political inheritance exceeds and stretches far beyond what is typically understood as 'history' and lineage. It is transmitted to us through the stories we grow up listening to, in what we come to recognise, retrospectively, in ourselves and others as ways of surviving the daily onslaught of racism, patriarchy, heterosexism and ableist forces that structure our everyday – as well as the shared forms of leisure, pleasure and joy that are also a source of our collective resilience.....a kind of connection and memory, a felt proximity [with the past/past struggles]...this connection, both imagined and real, is crucial for understanding the conditions under

which revolutionary struggle, radical thought and praxis can and do emerge (Bhandar and Ziadah, 2020:p3 and 7)

This expanded conception recognises the subjective, embodied and experiential dimensions of collective historical memory. Drozdowski et al emphasise the subjective aspect of memory, and its link to the sensory experience of humans:

memory is a powerful force invoking experience, emotion, and an awakening of the senses. Its affective capacity moves beyond stoic representations of memory in stone and marble, for example, it can be smelt, touched, felt, imagined, tasted, and heard. (Drozdowski et al, 2016:p447)

Nomadesc's pedagogical praxis provides an example of a social movement initiative which intentionally seeks to draw upon the past as a pedagogical tool in order to generate counter-hegemonic learning processes. Crucially, Nomadesc's experience shows that social movements need not only draw upon the history of their own struggles, cultures and stories. A radical intercultural pedagogical process which brings together multiple constituencies each with their own unique histories can generate rich learning and knowledge production processes through creating a dialogue with these unique histories, such that each of them are converted into collective pedagogical resources for struggle. In this way, the intercultural praxis fosters learning processes related to the generation of collective identity. Nomadesc's dialogical pedagogical approach not only creates dialogue between the diverse subjects and knowledges which converge within the UIP, but also generates a permanent dialogue with the collective historical memories of the social movements involved. For an intercultural counter-hegemonic process which seeks to build alternatives, the knowledge processes emerging from this praxis of collective memory bear huge potential.

Once more referring to the Epistemologies of the South framework which underlies this thesis Santos recognises the central importance of alternative histories within counter-hegemonic processes, especially those which have been suppressed and marginalised within post-colonial contexts (Santos, 2020, n.p.). Building upon his notion of an ecology of knowledges, Santos has called for an '*ecology of alternative histories*' (ibid). My research provides an example of a pedagogical praxis which can be considered just one such ecology, with Nomadesc acting as an inter-temporal translator in order to facilitate an ongoing engagement with the past. It does so not only in order to reproduce and sustain the collective historical memory and the counter-hegemonic knowledge it contains, but also in order to guide and strengthen the development of new strategies of action. Nomadesc's experience demonstrates that an ongoing dialogue

with the past can be an important pillar of intercultural pedagogical praxis, and a foundation of the intercultural knowledge dialogue.

If an emphasis upon collective historical memory within social movement praxis can be understood as a process which preserves, sustains and reproduces counter-hegemonic knowledge, then my research has demonstrated that such an emphasis becomes even more important in violent and repressive contexts such as that of Colombia. Hannah Arendt argued that totalitarianism is a system which prohibits remembrances and grief (1951:p423). Whilst Colombia may not be considered a totalitarian society, the high level of political violence in the country can be understood to play a similar role in seeking to prohibit and ultimately erase alternative memories and histories. Judith Butler argues, in her discussion of the work of Colombian artists Doris Salcedo, that the Colombian state's violence serves to render some lives as unworthy of remembrance or 'ungrievable' (Butler, 2017: n.p.). In the postcolonial context of Colombia, it is arguable that the lives of certain groups – indigenous and Afro-descendent- never entered the realm of grievability in the eyes of its European-descendant elites. Nomadesc's praxis, with its emphasis on collective historical memory in all of its dimensions, seeks not only to render these subaltern lives as worthy of remembrance, but to remember them in the different dimensions of their humanity – by maintaining alive their histories and their struggles. My case study has shown that in such a context, collective memory (and the act of collective remembrance) goes beyond counter-hegemonic knowledge preservation, or simple documenting of human rights abuses, and serves as a political act of resistance which can include vindicating and sustaining the alternative histories of the oppressed and in doing so nurturing alternative visions of the future.

Here it is useful to draw upon Rivera Cusicanqui's notion of '*memoria corta*' and '*memoria larga*' (short and long memory). Short memory represents the collective memory of events in living memory, struggles, everyday occurrences, which shape the experience and inform the praxis of social movements and communities. '*The practices and knowledge of collective resistance that elaborately make their way and in the process widen the crack of history, combining collective memories of which past struggles form part, and enhancing contemporary projects of emancipation* (Accossatto, 2017:p176). Long memory, for Rivera Cusicanqui, refers to a deeper substratum of the collective psyche of the peoples of Latin America, stretching back to colonialism, and the different forms of resistance *against* colonialism (ibid). This layer of memory also impacts upon struggle and praxis, as it coexists and interacts with contemporary events and memories. Hence contemporary struggles and societies manifest the simultaneous coexistence of a '*multiplicity of layers or historical cycles*' within the collective memory (ibid:p171).

Such a conceptualisation can help to understand the rich, complex, multi-layered nature of the collective memory which Nomadesc's intercultural pedagogical praxis draws upon through the coming together of such diverse subjects (and histories). In this praxis, the short and long memory of movements can be converted into resources not only for the struggle of a particular movement in question, but for all of the participating movements.

Prefigurative praxis as a constant learning process

I have made the case in this thesis for a broader understanding of the notion of pedagogy within social movement organising. As scholars such as Motta have demonstrated, the very processes of building decolonial, counter-hegemonic alternatives is necessarily pedagogical:

the construction of counter-hegemony, anti-hegemony or decolonisation involves 'learning to cross the divide', unlearning these relationships and practices and learning new ones by building upon fragments of good sense and the fractured locus between processes of subjectification and active processes of subjectivity. It is thus also necessarily pedagogical. This learning and unlearning can occur in the formal education, in the informal spheres of everyday life and centrally, in the pedagogical practices (formal and informal) of social movements. (Motta, 2014:p3)

The Nomadesc process discussed herein, with its intercultural and dialogical nature- is deeply prefigurative. Rather than seeking to impose a pre-ordained revolutionary path, *the path is made by walking*, to paraphrase the famous Zapatista refrain. As a working example of a radical intercultural pedagogical process occurring in a repressive, violent context, what can Nomadesc's experience add to debates around prefigurative organising and learning?

Ana Dinerstein contends that over recent decades, new forms of autonomous organising have emerged amongst social movements in Latin America which represent a break with Western notions of autonomous organising. For Dinerstein, this new politics of autonomy are (as with Western notions of autonomous politics) based on prefigurative strategies. She takes issue with the Western tendency to characterise prefiguration as '*the enactment of an ideal society*' (Dinerstein, 2014:p77). For Dinerstein, this characterisation is too narrow, since it '*reduces prefiguration to a self-contained organisational process*' (ibid), and fails to account for the autonomous politics which has emerged in Latin American with which social movements are engaged in building prefigurative alternatives at the same time as confronting hegemonic power structures.

Dinerstein argues that prefigurative organising seeks to build the utopia of tomorrow through the struggle of today:

The Oxford Dictionary defines 'prefigure' as 'to have particular qualities or features that suggest or indicate in advance something that will happen in the future'. In other words, prefiguring is about anticipating the future that is not yet in the present. ... This means that utopia cannot reside in the 'future' which is expected to be better as a result of a consequentialist strategy that regards the progression of time as linear. Prefiguration operates on a dimension of reality that is not yet in the present, the "latter being an unrealised future". Prefiguration's time is now time (ibid:p70, 76)

It is this connection to the dimension of the not yet which leads Dinerstein to posit a mutually binding relationship between prefiguration and the '*strongest of all human emotions*': hope. Dinerstein draws upon the work of philosopher Ernst Bloch, who argued hope performs a utopian function, in that it '*when educated, allows us to properly engage with a hidden dimension of reality that inhabits the present one: that which is not yet*' (ibid:p87). Hope, in this conception, underlies human existence, and is a necessary component of individual and collective endeavour. Dinerstein characterises prefiguration as '*a process of learning hope*' (ibid:p76).

My research would appear to support Dinerstein's linking of prefiguration, learning and hope. As demonstrated in chapter 6, one prominent finding was how participants described a sense of hope which their participation in the intercultural pedagogical space provided them. At first glance, this might seem counter-intuitive: in a situation where activists and social movements face daily threats, violence, tragic tales- the encounter and exchange of experiences between these subjects might be expected to increase fear by providing a broader sense of the systemic nature of the repression, and its generalised nature. Yet my research shows that it does quite the opposite. I argued in chapter 6 that this is because it involves the aggregation of hope which is contained within each of the struggles and organising of the diverse participants. Bloch and Dinerstein's conceptualisation of hope can help to understand the way that this process operates within Nomadesc's intercultural praxis. If the hope which underlies the different struggles of each of the movements of the UIP facilitates an engagement with a utopian dimension of that which is not yet, then we can grasp how the intercultural knowledge dialogue between diverse subjects of struggle facilitates an exponentially greater engagement with such a dimension. Through such an engagement, participants are able to envision a reality which is not yet, but which they are building in the here and now.

Dinerstein is right to draw the link between prefiguration, learning and hope. Yet, based on my research into the Nomadesc experience, I would argue that prefiguration itself can be understood as an inherently learning-based mode of organising. That is to say, by its very nature, prefigurative organising is a collective learning process through which subjects learn, construct knowledge and test out ideas and strategies. Hence, the Nomadesc experience discussed in this thesis, provides answers to a key question which Dinerstein neglects to ask: how do the concrete utopias of prefigurative organising serve as spaces which foster learning? The counter-hegemonic learning and knowledge production processes which occur within such spaces - which are characterised by alternative ideas, value practices, and configurations of social relations not defined by capitalist logic - are under-researched and should be of interest to activists and critical social scientists. I hope that my thesis provides a useful contribution to such literature. As I have argued, the Nomadesc experience can itself be understood as a continuous, intercultural, collective learning process, and demonstrates the generative potential of prefigurative organising initiatives between diverse subjects of struggle in terms of learning and knowledge.

For Dinerstein, the new politics of autonomy in Latin America, which she defines as the ‘art of organising hope’:

is an art that flourishes in extremely adverse contexts: It is the art of using knowledge creatively and politically to weave dreams out of misery, against the odds, amidst brutal state violence, endemic poverty, desperate hunger and social devastation. It means to learn how to engage in the politics of affection and, from there, manage setbacks and endure disheartening circumstances. (ibid:p91)

This phrase aptly applies to Nomadesc’s own autonomous praxis, and the way that through radical pedagogical praxis it builds prefigurative alternatives whilst operating in a what one Nomadesc activist refers to as a ‘*constant state of alert*’. (Nomadesc founding member, interview, 2018)

Ripple learning effects: temporalities of social movement learning

Temporality is a dimension which has historically been neglected within the study of social movements and protest, and even more so within the literature on social movement learning. My research, and in particular my identification of ripple impact learning processes, sheds light upon a significant relationship between social movement temporality and social movement learning which has not been sufficiently explored or understood within the literature.

Colombian scholars such as Motta and Bermudez have identified the temporal dimension as central to the logic of colonial capitalist modernity, and hence as a central element of the ongoing domination and exploitation of peoples around the world. They argue that *'hegemonic temporalities and times of patriarchal capitalist-coloniality...underpin the logics and rationalities in our politics, limiting our ability to move beyond the horizons, epistemologies, literacies, and subjectivities of capitalism (Motta & Bermudez, 2019: p424)*. Further, they point to

the hegemony of a unidimensional linear temporal narrative and infrastructure... This can result in universalisation and normalisation of temporal expectations of political performance which mirror the precarities, demands, and unsustainability of the social-political system we seek to transcend (ibid:p425)

This identification of the temporal dimension of the logics of coloniality is of vital importance in relation to social movements. Yet Motta and Bermudez mistakenly argue, *'Time and temporality often remain the unthought in our spaces, moments, and movements of radical political imagination and practice. It currently constitutes an important lacuna in our praxis of emancipatory change' (ibid:p425)*. Such a statement overlooks the central role which alternative temporalities hold within the epistemologies of socio-territorial social movements which are currently at the forefront of struggles for decolonisation in Colombia, as I have demonstrated in these pages. The temporal element of Colombia's alternative 'epistemologies of the South', and the way that these shape and interact with praxis of organising struggle, warrants further study. For example, what are the implications for emancipatory praxis of the temporalities of indigenous peoples, for whom timescapes are thought of on a much larger scale, thinking in terms of multiple generations and hundreds of years, as opposed to the Western tendency to think on a much smaller timescale? Or of the temporality of the Guambiano indigenous people of Cauca, Colombia, for whom the past is in front because it is known and we can see it; whilst the future is understood to come from behind, as a hidden element that cannot yet be seen (Vasco Uribe, 2018:p355)?

One attempt to theorise social movement temporalities was made by Gillan, who develops the concepts of timescapes and vectors in order conceptualise the way in which movements interact with their socio-political contexts, and how these interactions bring about changes over time (Gillan, 2020). For Gillan, the notion of timescape:

is used as a metaphorical placeholder for the socio-political environment in which social movements operate, with the intention to include both durable patterns of interaction

and the events which often serve to make social change visible...[it] represents a large-scale vista from a particular perspective (ibid:p519)

Gillan then introduces the concept of vectors in order to refer to '*patterns of social interaction whose repetition over time sustains or encourages further iteration*' (ibid, p520). Vectors allow us to track how the '*cultural and material flows of interaction shape discourses, practices, and subjectivities over time*' (ibid:p516). He develops the concept thus:

Vectors are dynamic, meaning that we can see development over time: vectors may diffuse across space, for instance, or increase or decrease in salience, intensity or velocity. The term 'vector' is used by physicists and mathematicians to express motion in terms of both magnitude and direction...some patterns of interaction have impacts with large geographical and temporal scope (i.e. they are extensive) and some have impacts that affect many kinds of interaction simultaneously (i.e. they are intensive) (ibid:p520)

Gillan's use of the concept of vector in relation to social movement temporalities can be related to my discussions of different aspects of the temporal dimension of the learning processes which are produced within the Nomadesc pedagogical process. Indeed, my identification of ripple effect social movement learning processes, which are produced within the Nomadesc pedagogical process and which cascade through time and space, are not simply one type of vector within social movement temporalities, but demonstrate that Gillan's concept of vectors actually refers to a characteristic of social movement collective learning processes. That is to say: whilst Gillan's conceptualisation provides a valuable frame for understanding and analysing social movement temporalities, he fails to appreciate that his notion of vector is tied up with the way that social movements learn, and the ripple learning effects of these learning processes over time. Hence, to talk about the way that '*cultural and material flows*' shape '*discourses, practices and subjectivities*' and alter '*patterns of social interaction*' is surely to talk about social movement learning processes: the way that social movements learn from their experience and interactions, and adapt their praxis as a result.

The notion of vector is useful to understand the way in which Nomadesc's pedagogical praxis harnesses the rich learning and knowledge production processes which occur within intense episodes of social mobilisation. As outlined in chapter 6, during social movement mobilisations, intense learning processes are generated. Drawing upon Gillan's conception, we can understand the way in which these learning and knowledge production processes which occur within social mobilisation serve to influence and shape many interactions at the same time. Nomadesc, through its pedagogical praxis, seeks to expand the temporal and geographical extensiveness- or scope- of these processes which are produced within social

movements mobilisation, as it does with all of the other knowledge and learning processes which converge within the intercultural pedagogical space.

Through the case study which has formed the focus of this thesis, I have demonstrated that the temporality of social movement learning processes is a key dimension which requires further study, and that researchers interested in social movement learning and those interested in social movement temporalities would find mutual benefit from engaging with each other's work. Such interaction would be of great benefit to the study of social movements. Gillan's important contribution to the theorisation of social movement temporality could be strengthened by an appreciation of the relationship between social movement temporality and learning processes.

For a decolonial theory and methodology rooted in dialogue, translation, and proximity to struggle

The theory and methodology employed within this doctoral research project provided ideal tools with which to analyse and understand the learning and knowledge processes pertaining to Nomadesc's pedagogical process, and to do so by centring the theoretical offerings of the social movement activists involved, without extracting Nomadesc and its work from the violent context of 21st century capitalism in the southwest of Colombia. My decolonial theoretical fusion mirrors the theoretical and epistemological journey and evolution of Nomadesc itself, with roots in anti-imperialist revolutionary traditions influenced by southern Marxism, and having more recently undergone a decolonial turn within its work and thinking, yet without renouncing or denying its roots. By engaging with these roots, bringing them into dialogue with alternative epistemologies and histories, Nomadesc is engaged in a bottom-up decolonial dialogue which produces '*teoria enraizada*', or 'rooted theory', as proposed by Rivera Cusicanqui: that is, theory which '*has its roots in experience, which does not deny its own history, nor its own genealogy, in its understanding of the world*' (Cacopardo, 2018:N.P).

Decolonial scholars Icaza and Vasquez argue that '*connecting traditions of critique that belong to different genealogies (Western critical thought and Latin American decolonial thought)...is a key analytical step. It is a way to move beyond universalism into forms of argumentation that are built on the possibility of a dialogue across a plurality of epistemic locations*' (Icaza & Vazquez, 2013). Mapuche scholar Hector Nahuelpan makes the case for genuine '*exchange and communication*' between Western knowledge associated with universities and indigenous knowledges. He posits that such a dialogue must

be rooted in a recognition of the interdependence which underlies all existence, between both material and immaterial elements and beings (*Nahuelpan, 2018*).

Such a dialogue is only possible if the researcher is able to genuinely listen to the alternative subjects, protagonists of concrete struggles decolonisation beyond the ivory towers of academia. My research has shown that the systematisation of experiences methodology is highly suited to this listening process, in order to create spaces of dialogical collective reflection, and foment processes of individual and collective learning. A genuine listening process means overcoming the self-referential tendency of scholars who seek to centre themselves as agents of decolonisation, and instead being present on the front lines of real-life struggles of agents of decolonisation. This is in line with the call of Rivera Cusicanqui for us to recognise that

theory isn't enough, social science isn't enough, the university isn't enough and academia isn't enough to understand the world that we are faced with today. I think that, in the whole of Abya Yala, this process of 'going in and out of academia' is facilitating the renewal of thought, and for thought to be better articulated to popular, community, collective practices. (interview by Cacopardo, 2018:p4)

Such an approach requires a renunciation of the notion of theoretical purity, and an embrace of the messy and relational nature of the ways in which theories develop. I believe that a decolonial approach which is apt for the challenges facing humanity in the 21st century is one which identifies and seeks to overturn the structures of epistemological domination; and which seeks to be useful to the social movements who are struggling everyday against neo-colonialism/the violent legacies of colonialism. This means retaining a close proximity to such struggles and their protagonists. It also means retaining a critically reflexive lens upon the histories, categories and assumptions of analytical tools and frameworks, in order to engage in a constant process of theoretical decolonisation.

Any research process carried out within an academic university – historically the central node in modernity's knowledge production systems, and hence imbued with colonial logic- will by its nature be wrought with contradictions and tensions. Even more so in a case such as my own where the researcher is based in a Western university, and the research subjects in the Global South. Does this state of affairs render it impossible for a researcher such as myself to produce genuinely decolonial work? Am I simply contributing to the river of ideas which run from South to North '*and are transformed into tributaries in major waves of thought*'? (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2012: p104). To be sure, if I thought this to be so then I would not have engaged in this research process. Cuero Montenegro (2019), in recognising the

contradictory nature of implementing decolonial research within the colonial context of the university, argues that a 'decolonial' approach must be seen as a 'guide, or a path to follow' rather than as an end goal. This alludes to a crucial aspect which I came to appreciate through the research process upon which my thesis is based: that the research *process* was at least as important as the final *product(s)*. That is to say, my own doctoral thesis was not the principle motivation behind this research process; nor was it the only product to come out of it. This was a research process imbued with a genuine ethos of co-production and solidarity, designed in conjunction with Nomadesc's activists, and designed with the aim of benefitting Nomadesc's work. In this way, we followed Solano's call for great importance to be placed within decolonial research upon the questions of '*how we did it, who with, and for what*', rather than '*what we did and what were the results*'. (Solano, 2015:p27). The products of this research process were designed with different audiences in mind: some more aimed towards critical academics, some more aimed towards activists (documents pertaining to the social movement learning research project were produced in English, Spanish, Turkish and Nepali). I hope that this thesis will be of interest to critically engaged scholars anywhere in the world, yet I am conscious that ultimately this will be one product from the research process whose audience will be more in the Global North. By bringing this translation of Nomadec's work, I hope to contribute to broader debates around social movement learning, and the question of what a genuinely decolonising social movement praxis could look like.

I would add to Solano's aforementioned methodological questions: 'what was the role of the movement/research partner?' And, 'what was the role of the researcher?' In relation to the role of the researcher, my research process vindicated my adoption of the role of 'translator' in relation to the 'epistemologies of the South' of the social movement partners. Such a role demands that the researcher de-centre themselves within both the data collection and the writing process. The translator role stands in contrast to that of the storyteller, proposed from within decolonial feminism by Motta, in which the researcher:

develops practices which facilitate inner voice and active listening; disalienating the internalisation of the denial of her/our capacity to gift, and in the process creates the grounds for opening towards critical intimacy... [The storyteller] is able to share and make visible her vulnerabilities as the epitome of strength and solidarity. She co-constructs spaces of dialogue through nurturing safety and recognition....This enables a stepping through anger towards self-love and love for the other. (2016:p42&43)

The storyteller role places the academic researcher at the centre of both data collection and the writing phase, at the expense of the marginalised voices of those on the frontlines of everyday struggles, including

indigenous and afro-Colombian communities who continue to live with the concrete realities of colonialism's violent and unjust legacies (Motta & Bermudez, 2019). The translator role, meanwhile, implicitly recognises the responsibility of the researcher, as a facilitator in a broader process of decolonial dialogue, able to use their position within Western academia to facilitate connections between social movements as well as ensure that marginalised subaltern voices in the Global South are heard both inside and outside of academia, and in this way contribute to the ecology of knowledges called for by Santos. Within the broader 'social movement learning' research project related to this doctoral thesis, my own role during the knowledge exchange meetings between activists from Nomadesc in Colombia and movements in Nepal, Turkey and South Africa was as an interpreter, providing me with the opportunity to play a facilitating role in deep conversations and collective reflection between activists from across four continents.

Concluding remarks

In concluding this thesis, I believe that my research has demonstrated the immense value and potential of social science engagement with the learning and knowledge production processes that occur within the counter-hegemonic cultures and knowledge configurations of social movements struggling on the violent and repressive peripheries of the global capitalist system. Social movement struggles are underpinned by constant learning processes, and can be understood as sites of (re)production of alternative values and modes of organising social relations which are shaped and honed by the learning processes which they produce. I have demonstrated that such engagement, as well as providing an overdue axiological corrective to capitalist modernity's structures of epistemological domination, can provide insights into the 'outside' of capitalism which is represented in the value struggles of social movements in the Global South as they contest enclosures and seek to defend and expand alternative configurations of social relations and values and new ways of being and living.

Given the opportunity, I would build upon my research with a more extensive discussion and analysis of the different epistemological and political lineages and frameworks which converge within the Nomadesc pedagogical process, including the thought of indigenous, Afro-descendent and peasant movements, and a more thorough examination of social humanism. Such epistemologies of the South remain under-researched, and as a result are often caricatured, misunderstood or romanticised within Western literature. I would use such a discussion to identify in particular the ideas and conceptual constructions

which have become central to the intercultural pedagogical praxis. Such a work can contribute to the development of a theory of translation, as called for by Santos.

Another aspect which would be worthy of further study is the question of the NGO form, and the way in which Nomadesc leverage this organisational vehicle for the benefit of social struggles in southwest Colombia, as well as its limitations. Such a discussion could provide useful insights into the way that a group of highly committed activists is able to work with social movements across the region, engaged in deeply political organising and pedagogy work, as well as ‘bread and butter’ work in defence of human rights. Whilst an extended discussion is beyond the scope of this thesis, I will make some brief reflections upon the subject here. Nomadesc is beholden to the political economy of non-governmental organisations, which means that they depend upon external funding (in this case exclusively donors from outside of Colombia), an undoubtable limitation upon their work. Yet they have developed an ethos which refuses to be driven by the market economy of the quest for NGO funding: they have non-negotiable political principles over which organisations they will receive money from, and of non-interference in the political approach to their work. Team members receive modest salaries (in contrast to large human rights NGOs in Bogota, for example), with funded salaries often having to be shared between several team members. The way of working which Nomadesc has developed provides the organisation with a high degree of political autonomy, allowing the organisation to be politically dynamic and creative. At the same time it means that the organisation lacks the democratic accountability of grassroots social movements. Valuable research could be done into Nomadesc’s use of this form in order to evaluate the emancipatory potential of the NGO form in a context such as that of Colombia.

A further element which would have benefitted the analysis in this thesis would have been to include a constituency which was not included in the systematisation of experiences: that of former activists - people who participated in the pedagogical process but subsequently gave up their activism. Whilst this consideration was beyond my own limited scope, the inclusion of this constituency could provide an important insight into the processes and factors which can make the difference between the sustenance or desertion of activism in harsh contexts such as that of southwest Colombia, and perhaps some of the limitations of radical pedagogical interventions. All of the above offer fruitful directions for further research that I hope to contribute to.

If I were to repeat the research process, I would have included from the beginning a deeper and more systematic engagement with relevant literature and debates within Latin America. My focus throughout

the research process was very much upon the collective research process with Nomadesc, and ensuring the voices of the protagonists of this pedagogical process were central. During my period of fieldwork in Colombia, I dedicated my entire time to and energy to Nomadesc. Given the opportunity, I would seek to spend a short time at a university in Latin America, in order to engage meaningfully with local researchers and debates. An important aspect of overcoming the colonial logics of Western academia lies in engagement with these debates, and such a task requires patient, pain-staking work and dedication.

Academic research necessarily entails generating a degree of theoretical distance and abstraction from the social reality in question, and by its nature could never capture or do justice to the sensory elements of social reality as it is experienced. Reflecting upon my period of fieldwork, I can't help but feel a disconnect between my attempt to theorise Nomadesc pedagogical experience, and so much of what I experienced during my time embedded within the Nomadesc team - the adrenalin-fuelled highs and lows; the paranoia-inducing fear and expectation; the devastating murders of comrades; the sheer intensity and ultimate euphoria of the Buenaventura civic strike. Such are the everyday realities of Nomadesc and the social movements it works with. And yet my fieldwork period was simply a small window into the realities which have helped shape the Nomadesc pedagogical process over the course of two decades. It would be impossible to do justice to what this initiative has meant on so many levels, in so many dimensions of knowledge, to so many individual and collective subjects, and to the accumulated emergent learning and knowledge production. I hope however that my research has at least provided an insight into the remarkable and prolific intellectual production which occurs on the frontlines of peoples' struggles in the most adverse and trying of circumstances. Today more than ever I am convinced that such knowledge and learning processes contain the fragments of hope for the future of humanity. Activists and academics interested in the urgent question of how alternatives can be built between alternative subaltern constituencies and the role which radical pedagogy can play in struggles for social change could surely find something to learn from Nomadesc's pedagogical praxis of weaving these fragments of hope.

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Annex 1

Profile of a range of the organisations, movements and struggles which form part of the pedagogical process

In order to arrive at an understanding of Nomadesc's pedagogical process, it is important to provide readers with a brief overview of the types of struggles and movements which converge within the pedagogical process. The aim here is not to provide an exhaustive list, but rather to give the reader a sense of the political character and cultural diversity of the political subjects involved.

Struggles for collective territorial-ethnic rights and territorial autonomy

Indigenous, Afro-Colombian and peasant social movements and communities can be described as socio-territorial movements (Halvorsen et al, 2019). This means that obtaining, holding and defending territory are central to the movements' identities and struggles.

Black Communities Process: Palenque el Congal (Proceso de Comunidades Negras): The Black Communities Process (PCN) is the most prominent national Afro-Colombian social movement in Colombia. It led the struggle for the recognition of the collective ethnic territorial rights of Afro-Colombian communities in the 1991 constitution. Its regional branch in Buenaventura, Palenque el Congal (referred to in this thesis as PCN-BN), has been involved in the pedagogical process since the beginning of the diploma programme in 2003. Nomadesc has worked closely with PCN-BN since collaborating to document large-scale human rights violations being perpetrated by paramilitaries in rural and urban communities around Buenaventura and the Pacific region during the early 2000s. Palenque el Congal has worked to organise both rural and urban black communities in Buenaventura in defence of territory, in contexts where they are threatened with displacement by armed groups in order to make way for corporate projects such as resource extraction or infrastructure expansion.

La Toma Afro-Colombian community council: La Toma community has lived in the mountainous rural area above Suarez, Cauca for over 400 years. The community was set up by people of African descent who won their freedom having been forcibly brought to Colombia as enslaved people. It was one of the first black communities to achieve their freedom in what is now Colombia. Located in a fertile area which is rich in natural resources such as gold, the population has survived from artisanal mining and subsistence agriculture and fishing. The territory's gold reserves have allegedly been coveted for a long time by

AngloGold Ashanti, one of the world's largest multinational mining companies. In 2010, an individual allegedly working on behalf of AngloGold Ashanti attempted to have riot police forcibly evict hundreds of families from the territory after the government granted mining exploration licenses. The community led a historic struggle, and eventually the government was forced to back down. The community and its territory remain targets for powerful economic interests, and leaders and community members are regularly targeted for violence and threats by the armed groups operating in the territory.

Isla de la Paz neighbourhood, Buenaventura- in recent years the PCN-BN expanded its work organising Afro-Colombian communities in defence of collective ethnic and territorial rights to include urban communities in Buenaventura which are being threatened by corporate projects such as the expansion of port facilities in the city. Isla de la Paz neighbourhood is one such community which has been engaged in a collective struggle against being displaced, and as a result has been targeted by paramilitaries working on behalf of powerful economic interests. Community leader Temistocles Machado was murdered by unidentified gunmen January 2018.

Afro-Colombian Community Council of the Western Cordillera of Nariño and Cauca (COPDICONC): Representing a collection of Afro-Colombian communities spread over a mountainous, inaccessible area which is a strategic geographical corridor and hence has been a conflict zone with presence of all of the parties to the conflict, with devastating results for the local population and in particular for community activists and leaders. Many community members have been killed, and many more displaced to the city of Cali. Nomadesc has worked to support the struggle for human rights of those who remain in the territory, as well as to support the organising process of the large displaced population in Cali. The community's organising is aimed at avoiding further displacement, preventing further human rights abuses, and facilitating the return of the displaced population.

Cerro Tijeras Nasa indigenous community and Honduras Nasa indigenous community: In the mountainous area above the town of Suarez, Cauca, the Nasa indigenous reserves of Honduras and Cerro Tijeras have been targeted by armed groups because of the strategic location of their territories and the natural resources they contain. Honduras community leader Robert de Jesus Guacheta was murdered by unidentified gunmen in 2009. Nomadesc has worked with the community to highlight human rights abuses committed against community leaders and the general population, as well as to support its struggle for the fulfilment of promises made to communities affected by the large Salvajina hydroelectric

dam constructed in the 1980s. Part of Nomadesc's role in the struggle involved initiating a cross-ethnic alliance between indigenous, Afro-Colombian and peasant communities in the area.

CRIC and ACIN

Indigenous communities are networked in democratic structures which form powerful social movements at sub-regional, regional and national level. These organisations are involved in supporting communities in the delivery of some public services. It is through these organisations that indigenous struggles are coordinated, and mobilisations organised. Nomadesc coordinates closely with these movements, and the participating indigenous communities each belong to such coordinations. In Northern Cauca, the ACIN (Association of Indigenous Councils of the North- Asociacion de Cabildos Indigenas del Norte) brings together predominantly Nasa communities, and is recognised as a particularly well-organised and militant movement. The Cauca Regional Indigenous Council (CRIC) is a Cauca-wide organisation, formed by Nasa and Misak communities to further the indigenous struggle in 1973.

ASOAGROS: A highly organised, political peasant community living in the mountainous, rural area close to the town of La Marina, centre of Valle, this was the first community to suffer a massacre at the hands of the paramilitaries upon their arrival to the area in 1998. Many leaders were killed or displaced. Nomadesc supported the community from its arrival to the southwest region at the time of the massacre in order to document the crimes and support the community's organising. ASOAGROS is an agricultural collective founded by surviving members years later as they sought to salvage the organising process. The community's struggle is around the defence of territory, the defence of food sovereignty, and the implementation of agro-ecological agricultural methods.

Committee for the Integration of the Colombian Macizo (CIMA): A social movement made up of the peasant communities in the mountainous area in the Colombian macizo region between Cauca and Huila departments. Communities in this area have led historic, coordinated struggles which have achieved high levels of political autonomy and local political influence for social movements which organise for in defence of territory, the environment and food sovereignty, and have also been heavily targetted for paramilitary violence, threats and harassment.

National Agrarian Coordination (CNA): a nationally coordinated peasant social movement bringing together communities from across the country to coordinate their struggle across the country. CIMA is the regional branch of CNA in the southwest region.

Organised labour struggles

Sintraunicol Valle- union of workers of the University of Valle campuses in Cali. Sintraunicol has led historic struggles against the privatisation of the university campuses, services, and higher education in general. It has also developed a social movement trade unionism organising approach, working closely with Nomadesc to support social movement struggles across the region.

Sintraemcali- union of municipal workers of EMCALI, the publicly-owned Cali energy and telecommunications company. During the 1990s and first half of the 2000s, Sintraemcali led a historic struggle against the privatisation of EMCALI, and through an expansive, pedagogical organising strategy broad together a broad-based civic coalition of trade unions, social movements and urban communities which was successful in preventing the company's privatisation. Nomadesc worked closely with Sintraemcali upon arrival to the southwest region and played an important role in developing the aforementioned strategy, as well as documenting human rights abuses against Sintraemcali and other unions, which were being heavily targetted at the time. The union has been gradually weakened in recent years through a range of mechanisms including systematic violence, infiltration and the establishment of parallel 'boss-friendly' unions.

Victims' organisations

National Movement for Victims of State Crimes- Valle del Cauca branch (MOVICE): MOVICE was created in 2005 as a national movement made up of victims groups from across the country. The movement includes civilian victims of violence by state forces and paramilitaries. The movement campaigns for the demands of truth, justice, comprehensive reparation, and guarantees of non-repetition. Within Valle del Cauca, Nomadesc works closely with the regional branch of MOVICE to support the organising of local victims' groups, document and highlight human rights violations in the region, and to agitate for an end to impunity.

The Association of Women and Men of Triana- a group of relatives of victims of the massacres committed by paramilitaries during the early 2000s along route of the Cabal Pombo road in the Pacific jungle region (rural area of Buenaventura, Valle del Cauca). The paramilitary violence caused mass displacement of the local (majority Afro-Colombian) population. When the communities started to move back to the area in

the middle of the decade, Nomadesc began to accompany the organising of some of the victims' relatives in their struggle for justice, truth, comprehensive reparations, and guarantees of non-repetition (2006-present). Nomadesc provided a bridge for the collective to the broader victims' movement and regional and national level, allowing them to connect with others and the broader struggle of victims in Colombia.

FUNDESCODES – NGO working with communities and human rights victims in Buenaventura, with a strong focus on collective memory. Has worked to document cases of enforced disappearance in the city.

Procesos sociales urbanos- barrial, estudiantes, sindical

Red Proyecto Sur- a youth activist collective operating in several municipalities of the Nariño region, working to develop political organising initiatives in collaboration with peasant communities, around issues including food sovereignty, the defence of territory, and anti-fracking.

Identidad Estudiantil- a student activist collective from the site of the National University in Palmira, organising on various issues including in support of food sovereignty for rural communities.

Women's collectives:

Women's Sugar Cane Cutters Committee -committee of women- mothers, daughters, sisters etc- who began to organise at the time of the (almost entirely male) sugar cane cutters' historic two-month strike in 2008 at the sugar refineries of Valle del Cauca and Cauca. The strike was a response to the aggressive government employment reforms favouring local oligarchies which control the sugar cane industry, as well as against the poverty wages received by the more than fourteen thousand sugar cane cutters in the region. The women began to mobilise and organise during the strike, and played a key role in collecting solidarity donations, cooking food at the picket lines, and leading protests and marches (including being violently attacked by riot police on more than one occasion). Many of the women became politicised during the strike, and they decided to continue to meet and organise after it finished. Nomadesc worked to support the women in their organising.

Annex 2

Example of curricular and thematic structure of diploma course

<i>Modules</i>	<i>Thematic content</i>
<i>Conceptual axis</i>	<i>Concepts of state, democracy and the people</i>
	<i>History of human rights</i>
	<i>Colombian conflict: history, causes and current situation</i>
	<i>Conception and classification of human rights</i>
	<i>Preparation of replica workshops</i>
<i>Contextual axis</i>	<i>Strategic interests in Colombia and the region</i>

	<i>Plan Colombia and the Free Trade Agreement (with the US)</i>	
	<i>National development plan</i>	
	<i>Preparation of replica workshops</i>	
<i>Procedural axis</i>	<i>Legal mechanisms for defence of human rights</i>	
	<i>Alternative mechanisms for defence of human rights</i>	
	<i>Social subjects and social movements</i>	
	<i>Popular education and ethno-education</i>	
<i>Research axis</i>	<i>Knowledge and perception</i>	

	<i>Investigation as a form of knowledge</i>	
	<i>Profile of the popular researcher (in relation to human rights)</i>	
	<i>The research process</i>	
	<i>Framing the research problem</i>	
	<i>Objectives of human rights research</i>	
<i>Reference frameworks</i>	<i>Theoretical and conceptual frameworks</i>	
	<i>Contextual frameworks</i>	
Research methodologies	<i>Methods, techniques and tools</i>	
	<i>Human rights and research</i>	

	<i>Data collection techniques (social mapping, interviews, focus groups, interactive techniques)</i>	
Module 5: Analysis and results	<i>Systematisation of information</i>	
	<i>Sharing of results</i>	
Module 6: Research today	<i>Challenges for human rights research today</i>	
	<i>The subject and the construction of popular power through research</i>	

Source: Nomadesc archive, 2006, taken from Araujo, 2015